THE BEST OF SCI-FI 12

Edited by

Judith Merril

Imaginative fiction by
WILLIAM BURROUGHS, JOHN UPDIKE,
THOMAS DISCH, J. G. BALLARD,
FRITZ LIEBER, BRIAN W. ALDISS
and many others

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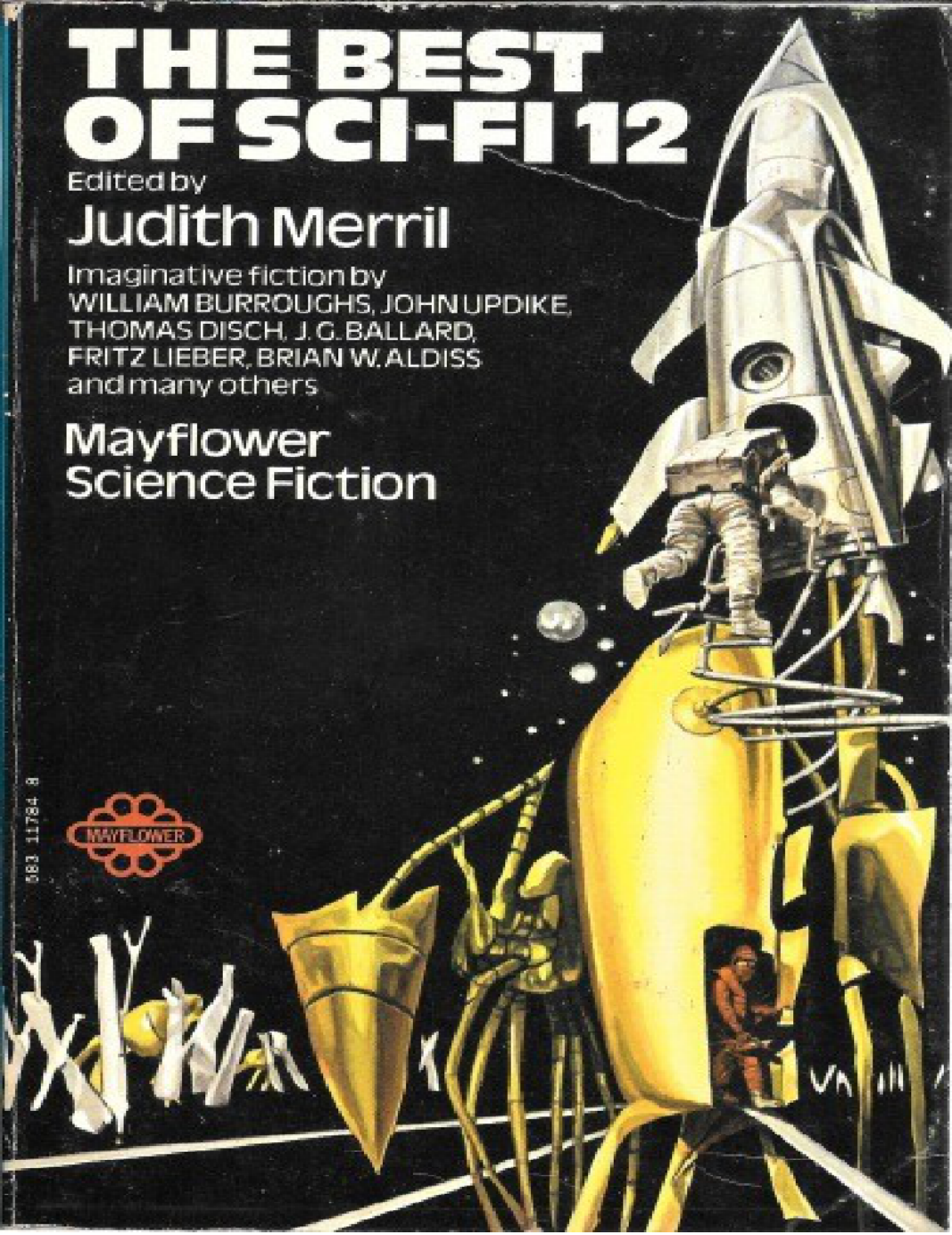
Science Fiction



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The Best of Sci-Fi 12
Edited by Judith Merril

Introduction:
Fish out of Water, Man Beside Himself
Judith Merril

We do not know who discovered water — [a small folder. Picture: orange fish against streaks of green and blue.] — but it was almost certainly not a fish. [And inside:] Anybody's total surround, or environment, creates a condition of nonperception.

It might have been intended as the essential statement on the motives, mode, and *modus operandi* of science fiction. Actually, it was an advertisement for a firm of industrial consultants, quoting Marshall McLuhan.

... sudden relevance to contemporary thinking. He orbits in the same system as R. D. Laing and McLuhan ...

That one was from a 'mainstream' London review of *The Disaster Area*, a collection of stories originally published in the s-f magazines of the fifties, and early sixties.

Well, one has one's little snobberies: best-seller philosophy, pop technology, two-culture professors — obviously, McLuhan. But I had just discovered Laing. And Edward Hall, Eduardo Paolozzi, Sagan and Shklovskii, John Barth. And, suddenly, *Sgt. Pepper!*

Take Sputnik I — October 1957 — as a not-so-arbitrary dividing line. Until then, the only body of literature seriously attempting to discuss contemporary man (meaning, *man in a self-made synthetic environment)* was science fiction.

But ... *the times they are a changin'* ... Dylan and Heller, for a start. Eiseley, Koestler, Fuller, Hoyle. And now: Ornette Coleman, Claes Oldenberg, Ed Emshwiller, Jarry and Borges, Burroughs and Michaux, Vonnegut and *(sudden relevance!)* Bailord — all popping up big, 'in', no longer enclave heroes but cultural phenomena ... *getting better all the time* ... Okay, so I read McLuhan.

In 1952, Reginald Bretnor wrote a brilliant predictive essay for his critical anthology *Modern Science Fiction*:

In science fiction, man is the proper study of the writer — man, and everything man does and thinks and dreams and everything man builds, and everything of which he may become aware — his theories and his things, his quest into the universe, his search into himself, his music and his mathematics and his machines ...

Science fiction's emergence *as a genre* is rooted in our failure to

understand the scientific method and to define it adequately ... This new awareness ... is growing, despite educational conventions which inhibit it, despite a literary convention which almost universally excludes it ...

Eventually, we will again have an integrated literature. It will owe much, artistically, to non-science fiction. But its dominant attitudes and purposes ... will have evolved from those of modern science fiction.

Asturias, Bulgakov, Singer, Nabokov, Martinson, Grass, Cortazar, *Transatlantic Review, International Times, Cavalier, Ambit, The Realist, Esquire,* Kubrick, Fellini, Lester, Godard, Ralph Nader, Mark Lane, Dr. Spock, Malcom X, The Diggers, Bertrand Russell's War Trials, *Ramparts, Report from Iron Mountain,* Burgess, Elkin, Updike, Hawkes, Friedman, Calisher, Southern, Landolfi, Martin, Barthelme. What do *you* read? or read about: The Delphi prediction; RNA memory transfer; moon landings; artificial hearts; multimedia, light shows, psychedelic art: 'God is dead' buttons and badges, 'Reality is a Crutch'. (Some of it is new; some is just starting to *happen.* Trotsky called it the Theory of Combined and Unequal Development.) I read McLuhan. In 1951, in *The Mechanical Bride,* he said:

No longer is it possible for modern man, individually or collectively, to live in any exclusive segment of human experience or achieved social pattern. The modern mind, whether in its subconscious collective dream or in its intellectual citadel of vivid awareness is a stage on which is contained and re-enacted the entire experience of the human race. There are no more remote and easy perspectives, either artistic or national ...

The magic that changes moods is not in any mechanism. It is critical vision alone which can mitigate the unimpeded operation of the automatic.

When that was written, 'mainstream' fiction was still strait-jacketed in a 'realism' left over from the certainties of nineteenth century mechanics and pure reason, and the science fictionists were almost alone in their efforts to seek new, remote, enlightening, if difficult, perspectives. Last year another Lit Prof, Robert Scholes, published a book called *The Fabulators* (Oxford):

The writer who is willing to accept the word as his medium ... must move away from the pseudo-objectivity of realism toward a romance or an irony which will exploit language's distinctly human perspective on life. In competition with the cold and lid-less eye of the cinema the sightless book must turn to the dark world of the imagination, illuminating it by the uniquely human vision to be found in words ...

Fabulation, then, means a return to a ... less realistic and more

artistic kind of narrative: more shapely; more evocative; more concerned with ideas and ideals, less concerned with things. I am not proposing here an airy program for the future. I am talking about what is going on all around us.

SF: Speculative Fabulation. A satisfactory solution at last for my abbreviation-in-search-of-an-extension?

'Science fiction' now means many different things to many people; but what it meant that was, for a short time, important is no longer so. Bretnor was right, and the time is now: his 'integrated literature' *is* 'going on all around us'.

My favourite button-badge says *Reality is a Crutch.* You will find much 'nonrealism' about 'reality' in this book, and a good bit of 'realism' about 'unreality'; also much more about men, media, and the 'McLuhan Age', among other things.

What they have in common could be called *outerness.* Maybe what *SF* really stands for is *Space Fish*?

The Cinemagicians
Tuli Kupferberg

The cinemagicians created people so real
They were able to walk off the screen
& enter real life.
They all got jobs in television.

Take a word. Take two: The Media. *Hollywood and The Networks and MadAve,* Time-Life, *PR, gold platters (and how presidents get elected). The British sometimes call it Admass. Above and below are two kinds of Media men. Tuli Kupferberg is a Fug. Harvey Jacobs is Public Relations Manager for ABC-TV's (satellite) Worldvision network — an Opinion Maker in the Executive Suite of the most assiduously Massaged Medium of them ally a veritable barterer of the Mechanical Bride, a subterranean stimulator, subliminally blowing other-directed minds all the hell over the Total Surround. The astonishing thing about Harvey Jacobs is that he has not allowed his medium to become his message. He does not even wear shades: not even to watch TV. Or movies.*

In Seclusion
Harvey Jacobs

Jason Briar and Monica Ploy met on the set of *Beowulf* and the hairs on him crackled with healthy electricity while she took in air like a vacuum cleaner and held it. He, the handsomest and the most virile; she, the softest and best curved, a vessel brimful of estrogen. "He is the very best," thought she, and "She is the tip-top," thought he. *Beowulf* was being shot outside London 'where it really happened', so the climate gave them no encouragement. But they needed none.

They became lovers. LOVERS! L*O*V*E*R*S* for themselves, for their fellow players, for the director and the producer and the staff, for the press, the public, for you and I. Their waking lives were gorgeous, working together and all that. To think of them at night running over moors where blue-painted Anglos and Saxons once ran was overwhelming. It was like looking with naked eyes at a fleshy eclipse of the sun, of the moon, of the entire physical universe.

He was married, she was married and they became unmarried and blended. Their ex's gave interviews to the papers wishing them 'the best', but theirs were rusty words. Ex Mr. Her and Ex Mrs. Him rattled like empty old scabbards. Who listened? Nobody. Even other empty scabbards turned away. For Jason Briar and Monica Ploy cuddled and fondled and tumbled for everyone. All cells rang like bells.

The trouble was their affair was ill-timed. *Beowulf* ran into production problems. (Something about fog.) So the celluloid climax occurred later than the lovers' hottest heat and by the time the movie was ready for selected premiere showcase theaters, millions of ingrates were thinking of other jangling thighs, of other midnight panting.

The studio sent them into seclusion. It was announced that they were going to be secluded like monks. They were going away to pure isolation, to a place of meditation and cold stone, to a place by the salty sea.

The studio found an abandoned abbey near an ocean. It was fine. There was no furniture. Not even a bed. NOT EVEN A BED. All the windows were broken. The garden was like a crazy man's lair. Ooze made lines on the thick, thick walls. There was, of course, no telephone. Wind from the waters whistled in the halls. You could hear spiders skitter.

The point? The point was peace. The lovers were going to find

peace and repose. They were going to discover hidden flavors far from the candy store. With a few cans and bottles, an opener and a busload of photographers, Jason Briar and Monica Ploy sent out to heal themselves in double solitary.

The concept got banner headlines right away. The story grew. The studio was pleased. Even the Ex's gave interviews again. On the fateful day that *Beowulf* opened across the nation the lovers said goodbye to civilisation. Their abbey was on a cliff jutting into the brine. There was only one road for access.

Guards were placed where the road joined the rest of the American continent and away they went carrying provisions in canvas sacks.

The lovers wandered wistfully. It was late afternoon. A pink cloud covered the sea. The sand was red. Bits of shell reflected sun like broken pieces of an urn. Jason Briar and Monica Ploy retreated into this magnificence. Even they were impressed.

They had never been to the abbey before so first they explored. The old rock house on an ancient hump of land teetered on the edge of Earth. There was a ribbon of sand separating them from the fishes, nothing more. The house itself was a thick cool egg, a ponderous thing with a hundred tiny rooms and one huge cavern downstairs. Jason Briar and Monica Ploy rattled around the premises.

"You know, Jay," Monica said. "I think I actually *like* it."

Jay looked at her and noticed that her lips were wet. Her lips were always wet. She licked them.

"We might as well, puss cat," he said. "Let's go for a swim."

Monica dropped her clothes where she stood. Jay too. Monica was brown as a nut except for two bikini lines. Jay was brown as she except for one bikini line. Monica ran a finger along his appendix scar. It was a shame, that one flaw. The doctor had shaky hands. The scar rambled. He might just as well have been nibbled by a lion.

Off they went to the ocean. The water was chilly but welcoming. They swam and splashed. Monica, lips wetter than ever, got hungry and thirsty. Jay, dripping puddles, pushed back his hair. He peed.

"Why do you have to do that here?" Monica said.

"Why not?"

"I don't know. You pee in the shower too, don't you?"

Jay slapped her gingerly on the can. Monica yelled. His hand etched on her bottom. She pulled a hair on his chest. They went up to the house.

"This is really fun," Monica said, and made her little noise, a gargled, swallowed purr for which she was justly famous.

In the cathedral of a living room, if that is what it could be called, Jay rummaged through the provision sacks. He found two cans of

beans, a fifth of Beefeater and a long spoon. There was a can opener too, with a bottle opener on the back. Jay opened the beans. Sitting on canvas bags, he and Monica ate. Then they drank down the gin. Soon both felt a glow.

"Watch yourself," Jay said. "I think I'm in the mood to stimulate a certain party's erogenous zones."

Monica stood up.

"Not on the stone floor," she said.

Jay unrolled their sleeping bags.

"How do you do it in there?" Monica said.

"I don't know," Jay said. "But we can find out. Thousands of people do."

Monica wiggled into a sleeping bag.

"I feel like some kind of product," she said.

Jay got in with her after some difficulty.

"How come your navel is kind of a football shape?" Monica said.

"What makes you say that?"

"It is. Not that it's important. But it is."

Jay could not see his bellybutton in the bag but he wondered about it.

They made love sideways then squirmed out of the bag. Jay checked his button. It was mostly circular, not at all football shaped. Monica was holding a mirror while she put on lipstick.

"A mirror? Cosmetics?" Jay said.

"I smuggled them in."

"Well the whole point was a kind of enforced austerity," Jay said.

"Who'll know?"

"Nobody. Unless some reporter gets by the guards. It's a matter of keep the faith. Not that that means much to some people."

"Some people are not hypocrites like other people," Monica said.

She put on a sack dress. Jay put on bermudas.

"Where do we wash up around here anyway?"

"Pump outside," Jay said.

Monica went out and found the pump. She worked the handle. A trickle of rusty water dribbled out.

"Is that a pump or an infection?" Jay said. He had come up behind her.

"Help me."

Jay pumped. The rusty brown water turned grey.

"I think that pump is connected to the sky there," Monica said.

A heavy cloud covered the ocean and it was indeed the colour of the water.

A wind blew from out at sea.

"Brrrr," Monica said. "I'm starting to freeze."

After the wash Monica and Jay went to get more clothes. A storm was blowing in, no question about it. Jay found some logs and kindling. He made a fire using a copy of *Harlow* to prime the flames.

"Cozy shmozy," he said.

"What shall we do?" Monica said.

"Scrabble," said Jay.

The Scrabble board was set by the fire and the tiles distributed. Jay watched Monica's face change. She loved competitive games. He hated them. But he liked to watch her love competitive games because he fancied that her true self emerged when she played them.

Games were a kind of sodium pentothal to Monica. After an hour or so of combat Jay knew he could ask her anything and get a quick, straight, honest and therefore cruel answer. Her answers always hurt Jay in his middle. They clashed with his convictions about what a woman should be. Despite that, he enjoyed the whole process. Monica knew what he was about but she enjoyed it too. And she actually did get carried away with the old team spirit.

"Strap on your phallus," Jay said. "The game begins. And remember in this one you don't collect $200 when you pass GO."

"Ooooo, you're going to get it," Monica said and proceeded to give it to him.

Monica could not concentrate on anything for more than a whisper so Jay opened with a spurt. He strained his head from the first gun. Monica came on like thunder too. It was a healthy, absorbing contest. Jay and Monica huddled over the board made great shadows as the flames jumped.

Outside the weather congealed to a murky soup. The cloud grew until it covered everything. The water moaned and churned. The wind whiplashed at waves and rocks. There was no more light.

At the root of the road leading to the abbey the guards looked toward the ocean and saw nothing but fog.

"How'd you like to be stuck out there with that broad?" said one.

"Oh yeah, yeah," said the other.

Then they went into a little shack that had been built by the studio for their comfort.

So turbulent evening settled on Jason Briar, Monica Ploy, the old stone castle, the ocean, the beach, the road, the guards, and the little shack.

It was at about this time that the creature moved.

The creature was so big that it really had no exact sense of its parts. In fact, it had no sense of anything at all except hunger and wakefulness. It was awake and hungry so it moved.

For breakfast it had eaten a whale. For lunch some dolphins, porpoises and sharks. Fish, fish, fish. The creature was sick of fish. So

it moved itself.

The thing on its head signaled meat. Somewhere, nearby, meat. Yum yum. It moved along the ocean floor, tons and tons of it, smacking thousand pound lips with four whopping tongues. Yum yum. The creature pulled itself toward shore.

"*Smart ass* is two words," Jay said. "As in the expression nobody loves a smart ass."

"A *smartass?* said Monica. "You pronounced it yourself. Ha!"

"Negative."

"Positive."

"No. No."

"Churl fink," Monica said, steaming from the ears.

Jay smiled knowingly as Monica came to another moment of truth. He sat nodding his head left to right while she counted up her points for *smartass* and he saw she was consumed with guilt. He sprung.

"Did you think my performance in *Beowulf* was solid class A caliber?" he said.

Monica shivered, wet her lips twice and told him.

"You were like walking constipation."

Jay swallowed dry foam. Tears welled in his eyes. He went for a swig of *Beefeater*.

"You asked me," Monica said. "Who asked you to ask me?"

When Jay came back to the Scrabble arena, the tears had dried to an opalescent wax. Monica though he looked sexy that way, with the eyes of a stuffed moose in a men's bar. She noticed him fastening his wax eyes to a spot on her neck that showed a thin crease and tried not to but couldn't help pulling at the collar of her dress.

A few hundred yards away, still submerged, the creature experienced a sensation of itching in what could be called its nose. It arched, making an island, then rolled, making a wave, then sneezed, bubbling a billion gallons of brine. Inland, one of the studio guards asked the other if he heard a strange noise. The other, absorbed in a magazine, had heard nothing.

The sneeze, a megaton of mucous, refreshed the creature and left it more awake and hungrier. Onward it went, flowing forward in slimy progress. The creature thought vaguely about its mate somewhere in the Red Sea. The thoughts waved like theatre curtains, rippling through its head. The creature had not made love in a decade, a thunderous thump back in the Straits of Magellan. Its scales practically glowed as memory flared and faded. It felt a bit horny.

The creature's instinct interrupted its reverie. "Eat first," the instinct commanded. So the creature sniffed for and found tantalising promise of gratification. It came faintly from the abbey borne on the

water-whipping wind. It was Monica's perfume the creature smelled, mingled with Jay's mortification. Mmmmm. Very tasty. Very juicy.

Fifty miles inland Harold Bipley, the Producer-Director of *Beowulf,* sat beaming behind a massive desk with legs carved like tree roots. Into his office came Harriet Troom on plump legs of her own.

"Pineapple," she said.

"Melon, baby," he said. "Sit down. Rest yourself."

Thirty years before a famous philosopher had gasped and died between the pudgy legs which Harriet Troom crossed neatly. He had just completed his worst book. Her legs were famous in intellectual circles just as her column was beloved by millions of readers on many sides of the Atlantic.

Harriet Troom was big on both ends of the IQ spectrum. Her heart held many secrets involving the living and the departed. Her body had shared heat with a variety of types ranging from old child stars to the famous philosopher. The residue of all that experience gave her terrific poise. Harold Bipley was impressed. But that very morning he had had a warning from his doctor. He went to the doctor because his arms felt tired, like heavy salamies. The doctor took Harold off sex and cuff-links. Harold liked both. Without sex he felt restless and sleepless. Without big cuff-links he felt as if his arms would fly out of the floppy sleeves of his silk shirt and hit a total stranger.

"There better be a story," Harriet was saying. "This is my bridge night and I gave it up for you."

"There is a story," Harold said. "As God is my witness."

"Continue."

"Word follows word, darling. Word follows word. You know about Monnie and Jay in seclusion?"

"Of course."

"That's where they are right now. In seclusion."

"So?"

"In a fat old church house by the water. Desolate. Bare. Empty."

"And?"

"Nobody around. Death to intruders. Get the picture?"

"Sure."

"So everybody is thinking of what's going on *inside* that seclusion, is that accurate?"

"Proceed."

"So one person emerges from the horizon to tell them. You."

"Ah."

"And it's spontaneous, Harriet. Not even Monnie and Jay have inklings. You go out there with a camera and a pad. Top secret. Peep a little. Bust in on them. Do what you want. It's all yours."

"I like it. I buy it."

"I was so sure you would," Harold said, "I called Hertz. My Rolls is waiting outside."

"I go alone."

"Any way you wish it is the way it will be."

"Where?"

"I happen to have a map."

"When?"

"Better soon. You know what a honey bucket Monnie can be. And Jay has no concentration either. How long will they last without electricity?"

"Tonight."

"It does me good to hear you say that, Harriet. Your readers are a hundred percent lucky to have somebody like you."

Harriet Troom took the map and went for the car. Harold Bipley watched her behind sway while she walked. His son was a navy pilot who landed on aircraft carriers. He felt sorry for the boy. A moving target is nice and challenging. But difficult.

At the moment when Harriet Troom aimed the Rolls down the highway toward land's end, the creature reached land's beginning.

Before assaulting the beach it gathered its parts together. There was a helter-skelter quality to such size. Pincers, legs, feelers, arms, buttocks, ears, *etc.* had a way of wandering off. The creature had a natural sense of order so from time to time it paused to take inventory and consolidate into a comprehensible lump.

It piled itself half in and half out of the surf. Because of the foggy dark the mountain it made was invisible. Now the creature, which was extremely light sensitive, felt a sting in a secondary eye. The eye detected a pin dot of light from a chink in the abbey wall. At the same moment a hectic spasm of wind wafted a ripe scent of the abbey's human visitors. The creature perked.

At once the entire scene seemed familiar. Of course. Years before the creature had visited that very beach and enjoyed a supper of Dominican Fathers. Bingle, bong. There was a bell. The creature's primitive head remembered the bell which it had nibbled for dessert. Brassy and tart. It jiggled for a year afterwards. The creature grinned, or tried to grin. One grey-green mass separated from another and exposed a slit of flecked orange mush. For the creature, that was a big, broad smile.

Inside the abbey Monica was feeling the empty triumph of the conqueror. She had won the Scrabble game by hook and crook. As she totalled her points she cried.

Jay was still in pain from her dirty remark about his talent. She

felt sorry for him and for herself. Victory in the game calmed her. She was now free to be nice. Jay needed some nice. He looked older by firelight.

"Darling," Monica said, "forgive me. There's always room for improvement. And it's not easy for me either with every erectable male person in the whole wide world wanting to have sexual congress with me. Sometimes at night I can feel my fans dreaming so hard I practically drown in seminal fluid."

"Don't I have that too?" Jay said. "The women plus the queers."

"Cheer up," Monica said. "It's so clammy and dismal out. We've got hours to kill and I'm not sleepy. I'm not the least bit sleepy. Tell me a story. Tell me how it was when you first saw me."

"No."

"Please."

"Stop tonguing your upper lip."

"I will."

"I first saw you in your first flick, *Beloved Runt,* and my breathing clamped. I thought at last the lord hath made a broad sufficient unto me."

"Fabulous."

"And I thought I've got to have her. So I met you and had you."

"What a way to tell it," Monica said. "How you hate me. You left out the entire love play sequence."

"You came at me so quickly I had no time for love play."

"I came at you? Jay, I was a star while you were doing improvisations in the Village."

"I did not say you had no distance on you when we met."

"I was discovered at 15."

"I'll bet you were."

"It was never like that. Never."

"Baby, you saw more ceiling before 20 than Michelangelo in a life of decorating."

"You are a filthy mouth. A sore loser. And don't ask me to calm you down when the going gets rough. Whisper never talked like you talk."

"Whisper Jones weighed 50 pounds when you married him and 34 ounces at the divorce."

"Annulment."

"All he wanted was custody of the oatmeal. You broke that boy's spirit."

"And Sherril? Didn't her pubic hair fall out from nerves?"

"How do you know that?"

"Never mind. It was all over town. Her follicles shriveled from mental cruelty. Hell, it must have been mental."

"What does that mean?"

"You break the code. Big virility symbol."

"Listen Monica, face the fact that your entire reason for being is to transport your mammaries to and from the studio. My work at least has a chance of contributing something, some little thing to the pool of artistic achievement. The best you can hope for is a medal in the tit Olympics. And they're getting saggy, if you want to know."

Monica inhaled and held her breath. Her face turned red. Jay watched her take in still more air. And more. She did very well.

"If you burst it's on your own head," he said.

Monica let the air gush out.

"Saggy?" she said.

She looked for something to break but there was nothing, only her hand mirror, so she threw a can of vegetable soup which went rolling around the stone floor.

Jay fell to his hands and knees and roared. Monica threw another can, string beans this time, and he scampered away. He knew that she would soon begin to play zoo, being a cat or some kind of rhino and that the argument would end up in jungley love. They had played zoo five times in six days and he was bored with it, but there was nothing better to do. The stone chilled his knee caps.

A log fell into the fire and sent up a shower of ash and sparks. The shadows leapt too, filling half the room with Jay and Monica, dolls cut from black velvet.

Outside the creature made a sound like *goorumbumbum* for no particular reason. It was on land, sloshing along. The air felt funny after years of water, amphibious or not. The switch from gills made the creature heady, a little drunk. It waved a score of flippers and swooshed a hairy tail. The wind confirmed that fresh meat was imminent.

The creature was sure of its prey. It began to think selectively, like a housewife at a butcher's shop, trying to remember the Dominicans and what of them was most succulent. Bonk. Its vanguard antenna touched something. The abbey gate. The creature had no time to knock. It secreted chartreuse juice, dissolved the rusty metal and squished toward the house.

"Sleep in your own bag," Monica said to Jay.

She was wriggled inside the sack, all the way in, and curled up sniffing her own perfume. Jay was pacing back and forth hitting his fist into an open palm.

"Once I stepped on a child star," Jay said, "and she didn't scream or yell or howl like other kids. You know what she did? She said 'Hi, there'."

"I'm sleeping," Monica said.

"And the awful thing is, Monica, that child star could have been you, It's what you would say. 'Hi there'. Oh Christ Almighty."

Monica's head came out of the bag.

"Try it," she said. "Try stepping on me."

"I am speaking symbolically," Jay said, "so I don't expect you to comprehend. Go back in the bag."

"Hi there," Monica said. "You think you're so damn superior. Didn't Mr. Bipley tell me how you were latching on to my star?"

"Huh?"

"How did he put it? He's marrying you for your light. He is a planet, a lousy planet, not himself a source of heat and smoke. That's what he told me. Hi there."

"Bipley told you that? Well stop the presses. He told me the same thing. He said, Jay let's face up buddy baby if HE hadn't rested on the seventh day maybe things in the world would be rosier, but he rested so we're stuck with our kismet and must own up to basic truth. Monnie, which is what he calls you, is a great shape, but an empty bottle and you will empty yourself trying to fill her. Beware, Jay, she needs your inner illuminations."

"Bipley told you that?"

"Monnie is a vampire who lives on reflections, he said. Reflections from mirrors, from eyes, from puddles, from hub caps, from sunglasses. Boy, was he a hundred percent accurate. Zowie."

Monica began twisting inside the bag.

"Finished." she said. "It's done. You are out of my life. You are dead and buried. You are garbage. I'm going home right now, you miserable pig bastard, and in a year from now nobody will remember you except like they remember a stain on the toilet bowl."

"That's great imagery coming from a girl," Jay said. "Go wet your lips."

"Don't worry yourself about my lips," Monica said, jumping out of the bag. "Worry about acting lessons."

"You membrane," Jay said, "You no talent. You physical bum."

"Listen to limpy," Monica said.

The creature wrapped itself cozily around the abbey like a moist rag. It started on the East Wing, then gooed over the North, slithered part of itself to the West and met its tail with its nose on the South. The moment of confrontation, front to rear, was rare for the creature and for an instant it fell under the impression that it had encountered a friend. It would have tipped its hat if it had a hat, but it had no hat so it snorted recognition. Its rear end gave no sign, except a faint pulsation, so the creature bit it in primitive rage. A bubble of pain ran through its nervous system along internal cords like seaweed and

reached its medulla oblongata with a clonk. The creature wailed. A teardrop formed and gurgled out of a red eye.

"Both parties suffer in divorce," Jay was saying when the wail sounded.

"If you're dreaming dreams about community property," Monica said, "over my dead body. Because I've got you under your own skin. Don't think she didn't tell me."

"What tell you? Who?"

"What tell me who? Bessie."

Jason froze.

"My god," Monica said. "The fattest cleaning woman in human history and you married to me and you couldn't let her go. You had to do it with Bessie the fat cleaning woman. You are some kind of pervert, if you ask my jury."

"So she told you, did she?" Jay said. "I'm glad. And maybe you will understand about how it was with the rain falling and me alone there in the house and this woman — *woman,* Monica, *woman* not girl. Obese yes. Older, yes. But a *woman. A woman,* Monica."

"A fat cleaning woman."

"It was the best and purest moment of my life," Jay said.

"Yeah," Monica said. "I had to give her the rest of the week off. And the worst is not the threat of blackmail, no. The worst is she was disappointed. She was crushed. A movie buff left dead with no more dreams even from you."

"Muskless person."

"I have more musk in my little finger," Monica said.

"The deposit bottle boy told me," Jay said.

Monica twitched and quivered.

"What deposit bottle boy?"

"That deposit bottle boy. The centrefold from the Scout Handbook. Be prepared. Oh, lordy. It was all over the supermarket."

"I admit it," Monica said. "At least I felt youth and strength surging white heat through my loins."

"Youth and strength? From that senile midget? Youth and strength? They only sent him out after the six ounce empties, the two centres."

"He was so grateful. So damned grateful he cried. And you know what? I'm glad they know in the market. I'm glad because as long as that boy goes around on his bike its like written on a wall you were not man enough to satisfy me. It's a bug on your plate."

"It cost me a hundred dollars to keep him from selling descriptions to the magazines. That fink wrote a piece called *Acne Valentino*."

"You stopped him?"

"For you, honey. It was a *knock*."

"Hoooooo."

"He complained you didn't tip him."

"Hoooooo."

Curled around the abbey the creature cuddled its potential goodies. The rump-nip was like an overture to satisfaction. Its gastric mechanism stormed. The creature fed by absorption. It could have absorbed the building but stone lay lumpy in its gut. It sensed the abbey as a shell with the nourishment deep inside. This kind of feasting came natural to a sea beast. The point was to get the inside out.

The creature, cautious, extended a tentative tentacle through a window. A fuzzy purple snake, it squirmed to the floor and along the ground.

"What's fuzzy purple and squirms along the ground," Jay said.

"No elephant jokes," Monica said.

She was packed, dressed, coated. She threw a kiss at Jay and went to the door.

"Monica," Jay said.

She opened the door and walked through it squoosh into the creature's underbelly. Monica recoiled into the room. Backward she came and tripped over the fuzzy purple tentacle.

"There's something damn strange going on here," Jay said.

The tentacle was exploring Monica. She watched this happen, then leaped to her feet. She wanted to scream but could not muster sufficient wind.

"It has suction cups," Jay said.

"I deplore suction cups," Monica said in a daze.

Then she let out a bellow that sent vibrations up and down the creature's epiglottis.

"Help, help," Monica shouted.

"I'm here, darling," Jay said.

The creature sent two or three more tentacles into the room. They played tag with Jay and Monica. One of them had an eye at its end, one a lobster claw and one a nostril. All were active.

"Watch out for the squiggly devils," Jay shouted.

"My earring," Monica said.

A deft movement of the second tentacle had snatched an earring off Monica's lobe. It vanished in a bubble of acid. The earring pleased the creature as an oysterette might please a guest at an informal dinner. It wanted more. The tentacle gyrated gluttonously.

"My ear," Monica said.

"Throw it the other earring," Jay said.

Monica hurled the second earring onto the floor. It was caught and consumed.

The tentacle with the eye came over and gawked at Jay. He patted it. It withdrew, blinking.

Jay's hand was covered with goosh.

"It's not plastic," Jay said. "I don't think this is a gag. Monica, this isn't candid camera."

Jay quickly lost his composure.

"Do something," Monica said. "It's trying to eat us."

The pincer lunged at Jay's shoe. It got a lace, no more. The nostril sniffed at Monica's discarded luggage. The eye kept its distance but changed expression. It seemed less passive and more malevolent.

Jay and Monica huddled in the centre of the abbey's great hall. Their move was strategic. The creature had limitations and one of them was the length of its tentacles. It could not reach them.

But it also had the capacity to divert growth-energy into any special part and its growth was consistent and impressive. With solid will power it shifted its biology and the tentacles began to add inches.

Also, to curb its impatience, the creature forced itself as close into the room as was possible. It seeped in bulges through the windows and the open door. A flap of it squeezed through a crack in the wall. An appendage came down the chimney like Santa Claus and blobbed into the fireplace. Its dampness hissed out the flames. The abbey was pitch pitch black, except for the tentacle eye which had a shoddy luminescence.

After a short silence in which Jay and Monica stood smelling the creature's fabulous presence, Jay stroked Monica's hair.

"We are definitely going to be consumed," Jay said. "Unless this is some Oedipal dream."

"Why? Why?" Monica said. "So full of hope. So vibrant and so dynamic. At the beginning of her career."

"Her career?"

"Our. Our careers. Don't nitpick. Not now."

"A few minutes ago we hated each other," Jay said.

"E pluribus unum," Monica said. "Que sera sera."

"Now we are lovers again. Confessed-out lovers. I feel reborn."

"I too."

"Yet we can't even carve a heart on the floor," Jay said. "We can't even leave a note."

"It sounds hungry," Monica said. "You can sense its ravenous hunger."

The creature's stomachs had begun to rumble.

"It wants food," Monica said. "You could take bets on that."

"Oh it's a people eater all right."

"One wonders how much food is food for something like that," Monica said.

"Whole cities."

"Not if it were snack hungry. Not if it were hot for a nosh."

"I don't think so."

"Sometimes a potato chip is what a person wants more than a steak."

"Not in this case."

"You don't know."

"Not for certain."

"Then why should we both die if maybe a piece of just one of us would do the whole trick?"

"I get your thinking," Jay said. "It's pretty creative."

"In life boats they eat each other rather than all starve. It makes sense, honey."

"I can't let you do it," Jay said.

"Me do what?"

The creature had already added six inches to its tentacles. A foot or so more and it would reach vitamins. It huffed and puffed.

"Who then?" Jay said. "Certainly not me. In life boats the decisions are made by last minute logic. The survivor is the most important, the one who has the most reason to survive."

"So? The cleaning woman is pregnant?"

"Frankly, sweet, I was thinking along artistic lines."

"Artistic lines?"

The house shook as a flutter ran through the creature. It was a flutter of confusion, the confusion of appetites again. Now that its eye and nostril were nearer to Monica it experienced an unexpected urge to replace the pincer tentacle with more refined anatomy. It felt a surge of love.

Jay and Monica noticed the flutter and instantly understood from their own personal experiences.

"It's a female," Jay said.

"Not in a million Sundays," Monica said.

"So what's the difference? Those things carry you into the sea to a fate worse than death."

"It's better than being swallowed."

"You would think so."

Monica was already smiling in the dark. The eye turned away. The nostril tentacle advanced and Monica kissed it.

"Stop that," Jay said. "Don't act like a whore."

Jay pulled Monica back and the pincer took a crack at him.

"It's me," Monica said. "I knew it."

Jay acknowledged the attraction. He felt a surge of jealousy and envy. So did the creature which squeezed harder at its growth cells. It had determined to eat Jay and spare Monica so that it could carry her into caverns of green to a fate worse than death.

"That's no kind of relationship," Jay was saying.

Monica wet her lips for good luck. The pincer was now a fraction of distance from Jay.

"Goodbye, dearest," Monica said.

"Seriously, what did you think of my job in the film?" Jay said.

Monica chose the course of honesty and said nothing.

Jay bit the creature. He was hysterical with rejection. He took a chunk out of the nearest tentacle.

"Like sardines," he said.

The creature took a piece of Jay's index finger. Simultaneously, it got sick.

"Everybody is a critic," Monica said.

"What's with this cruddy beast?" Jay said, licking his fingertip.

Monica hardly noticed that the nostril tentacle was wrapped around her lovely waist. She only saw the creature withdrawing from Jay and could detect that it turned a wee bit greener by the luminous eye.

"It don't like the taste of you," she said.

"Come back here," Jay yelled, and took another bite.

The creature was completely intimidated. The fingertip caused chronic indigestion. It wanted to get back to the cool ocean.

"The hell with you," Jay screamed.

"TS," Monica said, "being drawn by the tentacle. The creature felt icky but still very horny.

"The best to you," Jay said. "I hope you'll be very happy together. You deserve each other."

"We have similar tastes," Monica said. Then she realised that she was in deep trouble. Flattering as it was, she did not want to go into an unknown world, especially one without mass media. And she could not even trust that Jay would tell the story without distortion.

The creature pulled Monica up and through a window. It carried her like a suitcase as it scuttled toward the water. Jay ran after it taking nips.

"Get me down," Monica said. "Please, Jay. We work well together."

The creature hesitated. A prehistoric memory waved curtains in its brain once more. It recalled being caught by its mate in the company of a German lady way way back. The memory was unpleasant, full of flailing. It loosened its hold on Monica, but not entirely.

"It's feeling guilty," Monica said with perfect intuition. "It's letting me go."

"Talk about summer romances," Jay said. "Wait when *Variety* gets this poop."

"You wouldn't. Not even you would."

"Hi, there," Jay said.

"Take me," Monica was screaming. The creature was trying to shake her loose, but she held on with long fingers.

"Oh look there," Jay said.

Harriet Troom, camera ready, came rushing down to the beach in Harold Bipley's Rolls.

"It wouldn't eat him," Monica was saying.

"It wouldn't have relations with her," Jay was yelling.

Harriet Troom, clicking flash pictures with her non-driving hand pulled the Rolls as close as she could. The creature, terrified, was half in the sea, still whirling Monica around like a propeller. The car with its lantern headlights and the popping flash and the white-lit face of Harriet Troom grinning widely under glass was too much for it. It resorted to a kind of flying apart which creatures of its type could manage. It turned itself into a broken jig saw of parts, then fused together.

In the splash and roar, Monica was dislodged. Harriet Troom, driving too close, got incorporated. The lights of the Rolls and the popping flash could be seen through the creature's crinkley hide as it vanished under the waves.

Jay and Monica stood on the shore. Neither spoke. Both were committed to eternal secrecy by events that interacted like penalties which nullify one another in football games. They waited there until high tide rinsed the sand, and washed away the tire tracks and creature marks.

Back in the abbey they gathered their belongings.

"We shouldn't leave until morning," Monica said.

"No," Jay said. "And we have hours before dawn sheds its rosy glow on all concerned."

"I have a pencil," Monica said.

With Monica's eyebrow pencil, by the light of some stars, they wrote Harriet Troom's next column. They could keep filing columns until she was missed or something came up on a beach somewhere.

Later they crawled into Jay's sleeping bag.

Up a way, the guards were fast asleep.

Back in the studio, Harold Bipley dictated a press release into a tape recorder. It told how Jason Briar and Monica Ploy were purged and purified through their ordeal of isolation and seclusion.

"Like an atomic age Adam and Eve," he said to the microphone,

"two million dollar talents came back to the world today with new maturity and a solid sense of direction." Then he said, "Hold for release." Then he thought soft thoughts about his two favourites and how things were going for them out there. Spiritually, he was right with them in the bag.

Take a word: call it Pop!

Once upon a time, Pop *was the complement, or maybe supplement, of* Mom. *Today it is simply the opposite: any opposite, (Anything Mom doesn't like can't be* all *bad.) Since it sometimes needs Susan Sontag to explain it,* Pop *does not always mean 'popular'. Possibly the etymology is the third term of* Snap! Crackle ! Pop! *characteristics are: colourfulness (visual* or *audible); an illusion of unpredictability achieved by the quantification of the commonplace (multiply the Campbell Soup can — amplify the* 4/4 *march beat — divide Batman into his component dots —*); *and ideally, a certain glossiness typical of the classical (pre-TV, or "Gutenberg') decades of magazine and cereal-box advertising.*

Neither technical nor contextual quality are significant Pop *criteria.* Content *(or innate* message) *is permissible if it did not originate with the designer, producer, or arranger, and does not distract attention from the arrangement, display, or* happening.

Much of it is ingenious: almost all of it is cheerful.

The Food Farm
Kit Reed

So here I am, warden-in-charge, fattening them up for our leader, Tommy Fango; here I am laying on the banana pudding and the milkshakes and the cream-and-brandy cocktails, going about like a technician, gauging their effect on haunch and thigh when all the time it is I who love him, I who could have pleased him eternally if only life had broken differently. But I am scrawny now, I am swept like a leaf around corners, battered by the slightest wind. My elbows rattle against my ribs and I have to spend half the day in bed so a gram or two of what I eat will stay with me, for if I do not, the fats and creams will vanish, burned up in my own insatiable furnace, and what little flesh I have will melt away.

Cruel as it may sound, I know where to place the blame.

It was vanity, all vanity, and I hate them most for that. It was not my vanity, for I have always been a simple soul; I reconciled myself early to reinforced chairs and loose garments, to the spattering of remarks. Instead of heeding them I plugged in, and I would have been happy to let it go at that, going through life with my radio in my bodice, for while I never drew cries of admiration, no one ever blanched and turned away.

But they were vain and in their vanity my frail father, my pale, scrawny mother saw me not as an entity but a reflection on themselves. I flush with shame to remember the excuses they made for me. "She takes after May's side of the family," my father would say, denying any responsibility. "It's only baby fat," my mother would say, jabbing her elbow into my soft flank. "Nelly is big for her age." Then she would jerk furiously, pulling my voluminous smock down to cover my knees. That was when they still consented to be seen with me. In that period they would stuff me with pies and roasts before we "went anywhere, filling me up so I would not gorge myself in public. Even so I had to take thirds, fourths, fifths and so I was a humiliation to them.

In time I was too much for them and they stopped taking me out; they made no more attempts to explain. Instead they tried to think of ways to make me look better; the doctors tried the fool's poor battery of pills; they tried to make me join a club.

For a while my mother and I did exercises; we would sit on the floor, she in a black leotard, I in my smock. Then she would do the brisk one-two, one-two and I would make a few passes at my toes. But I had to listen, I had to plug in, and after I was plugged in naturally I

had to find something to eat; Tommy might sing and I always ate when Tommy sang, and so I would leave her there on the floor, still going one-two, one-two. For a while after that they tried locking up the food. Then they began to cut into my meals.

That was the crudest time. They would refuse me bread, they would plead and cry, plying me with lettuce and telling me it was all for my own good. My own good. Couldn't they hear my vitals crying out? I fought, I screamed, and when that failed I suffered in silent obedience until finally hunger drove me into the streets. I would lie in bed, made brave by the Monets and Barry Arkin and the Philadons coming in over the radio, and Tommy (there was never enough; I heard him a hundred times a day and it was never enough; how bitter that seems now!). I would hear them and then when my parents were asleep I would unplug and go out into the neighbourhood. The first few nights I begged, throwing myself on the mercy of passers-by and then plunging into the bakery, bringing home everything I didn't eat right there in the shop. I got money quickly enough; I didn't even have to ask. Perhaps it was my bulk, perhaps it was my desperate subverbal cry of hunger; I found I had only to approach and the money was mine. As soon as they saw me, people would whirl and bolt, hurling a purse or wallet into my path as if to slow me in my pursuit; they would be gone before I could even express my thanks. Once I was shot at. Once a stone lodged itself in my flesh.

At home my parents continued with their tears and pleas. They persisted with their skim milk and their chops, ignorant of the life I lived by night. In the daytime I was complaisant, dozing between snacks, feeding on the sounds which played in my ear, coming from the radio concealed in my dress. Then, when night fell, I unplugged; it gave a certain edge to things, knowing I would not plug in again until I was ready to eat. Some nights this only meant going to one of the caches in my room, bringing forth bottles and cartons and cans. On other nights I had to go into the streets, finding money where I could. Then I would lay in a new supply of cakes and rolls and baloney from the delicatessen and several cans of ready-made frosting and perhaps a flitch of bacon or some ham; I would toss in a basket of oranges to ward off scurvy and a carton of candy bars for quick energy. Once I had enough I would go back to my room, concealing food here and there, rearranging my nest of pillows and comforters. I would open the first pie or the first half-gallon of ice cream and then, as I began, I would plug in.

You had to plug in; everybody that mattered was plugged in. It was our bond, our solace and our power, and it wasn't a matter of being distracted, or occupying time. The sound was what mattered, that and the fact that fat or thin, asleep or awake, you were important

when you plugged in, and you knew that through fire and flood and adversity, through contumely and hard times there was this single bond, this common heritage; strong or weak, eternally gifted or wretched and ill-loved, we were all plugged in.

Tommy, beautiful Tommy Fango, the others paled to nothing next to him. Everybody heard him in those days; they played him two or three times an hour but you never knew when it would be so you were plugged in and listening hard every living moment; you ate, you slept, you drew breath for the moment when they would put on one of Tommy's records, you waited for his voice to fill the room. Cold cuts and cupcakes and game hens came and went during that period in my life, but one thing was constant; I always had a cream pie thawing and when they played the first bars of "When a Widow" and Tommy's voice first flexed and uncurled, I was ready, I would eat the cream pie during Tommy's midnight show. The whole world waited in those days; we waited through endless sunlight, through nights of drumbeats and monotony, we all waited for Tommy Fango's records, and we waited for that whole unbroken hour of Tommy, his midnight show. He came on live at midnight in those days; he sang, broadcasting from the Hotel Riverside, and that was beautiful, but more important, he talked, and while he was talking he made everything all right. Nobody was lonely when Tommy talked; he brought us all together on that midnight show, he talked and made us powerful, he talked and finally he sang. You have to imagine what it was like, me in the night, Tommy, the pie. In a while I would go to a place where I had to live on Tommy and only Tommy, to a time when hearing Tommy would bring back the pie, all the poor lost pies ...

Tommy's records, his show, the pie ... that was perhaps the happiest period of my life. I would sit and listen and I would eat and eat and eat. So great was my bliss that it became torture to put away the food at daybreak; it grew harder and harder for me to hide the cartons and the cans and the bottles, all the residue of my happiness. Perhaps a bit of bacon fell into the register; perhaps an egg rolled under the bed and began to smell. All right, perhaps I did become careless, continuing my revels into the morning, or I may have been thoughtless enough to leave a jelly roll unfinished on the rug. I became aware that they were watching, lurking just outside my door, plotting as I ate. In time they broke in on me, weeping and pleading, lamenting over every ice cream carton and crumb of pie; then they threatened. Finally they restored the food they had taken from me in the daytime, thinking to curtail my eating at night. Folly. By that time I needed it all, I shut myself in with it and would not listen. I ignored their cries of hurt pride, their outpourings of wounded vanity, their puny little threats. Even if I had listened, I could not have forestalled

what happened next.

I was so happy that last day. There was a Smithfield ham, mine, and I remember a jar of cherry preserves, mine, and I remember bacon, pale and white on Italian bread. I remember sounds downstairs and before I could take warning, an assault, a company of uniformed attendants, the sting of a hypodermic gun. Then the ten of them closed in and grappled me into a sling, or net, and heaving and straining, they bore me down the stairs. I'll never forgive you, I cried, as they bundled me into the ambulance. I'll never forgive you, I bellowed as my mother in a last betrayal took away my radio, and I cried out one last time, as my father removed a hambone from my breast: I'll never forgive you. And I never have.

It is painful to describe what happened next. I remember three days of horror and agony, of being too weak, finally, to cry out or claw the walls. Then at last I was quiet and they moved me into a sunny, pastel, chintz-bedizened room. I remember that there were flowers on the dresser and someone watching me.

"What are you in for?" she said.

I could barely speak for weakness. "Despair."

"Hell with that," she said, chewing. "You're in for food."

"What are you eating?" I tried to raise my head.

"Chewing. Inside of the mouth. It helps."

"I'm going to die."

"Everybody thinks that at first. I did." She tilted her head in an attitude of grace. "You know, this is a very exclusive school."

Her name was Ramona and as I wept silently, she filled me in. This was a last resort for the few who could afford to send their children here. They prettied it up with a schedule of therapy, exercise, massage; we would wear dainty pink smocks and talk of art and theater; from time to time we would attend classes in elocution and hygiene. Our parents would say with pride that we were away at Faircrest, an elegant finishing school; we knew better — it was a prison and we were being starved.

"It's a world I never made," said Ramona, and I knew that her parents were to blame, even as mine were. Her mother liked to take the children into hotels and casinos, wearing her thin daughters like a garland of jewels. Her father followed the sun on his private yacht, with the penants flying and his children on the fantail, lithe and tanned. He would pat his flat, tanned belly and look at Ramona in disgust. When it was no longer possible to hide her, he gave in to blind pride. One night they came in a launch and took her away. She had been here six months now, and had lost almost a hundred pounds. She must have been monumental in her prime; she was still huge.

"We live from day to day," she said. "But you don't know the

worst."

"My radio," I said in a spasm of fear. "They took away my radio."

"There is a reason," she said. "They call it therapy."

I was mumbling in my throat, in a minute I would scream.

"Wait." With ceremony, she pushed aside a picture and touched a tiny switch and then, like sweet balm for my panic, Tommy's voice flowed into the room.

When I was quiet she said, "You only hear him once a day."

"No."

"But you can hear him any time you want to. You hear him when you need him most."

But we were missing the first few bars and so we shut up and listened, and after "When a Widow" was over we sat quietly for a moment, her resigned, me weeping, and then Ramona threw another switch and the Sound filtered into the room, and it was almost like being plugged in.

"Try not to think about it."

"I'll die."

"If you think about it you *will* die. You have to learn to use it instead. In a minute they will come with lunch," Ramona said and as The Screamers sang sweet background, she went on in a monotone: "A chop. One lousy chop with a piece of lettuce and maybe some gluten bread. I pretend it's a leg of lamb, that works if you eat very, very slowly and think about Tommy the whole time; then if you look at your picture of Tommy you can turn the lettuce into anything you want, Caesar salad or a whole smorgasbord, and if you say his name over and over you can pretend a whole bombe or torte if you want to and ... "

"I'm going to pretend a ham and kidney pie and a watermelon filled with chopped fruits and Tommy and I are in the Rainbow Room and we're going to finish up with Fudge Royale ... " I almost drowned in my own saliva; in the background I could almost hear Tommy and I could hear Ramona saying, "Capon, Tommy would like capon, canard a l'orange, Napoleons, tomorrow we will save Tommy for lunch and listen while we eat ... " and I thought about that, I thought about listening and imagining whole cream pies and I went on," ... lemon pie, rice pudding, a whole Edam cheese ... I think I'm going to live."

The matron came in the next morning at breakfast, and stood as she would every day, tapping red fingernails on one svelte hip, looking on in revulsion as we fell on the glass of orange juice and the hard-boiled egg. I was too weak to control myself; I heard a shrill sniveling sound and realised only from her expression that it was my own voice: "Please, just some bread, a stick of butter, anything, I could lick the dishes if you'd let me, only please don't leave me like this,

please ... " I can still see her sneer as she turned her back, I felt Ramona's loyal hand on my shoulder. "There's always toothpaste but don't use too much at once or they'll come and take it away from you."

I was too weak to rise and so she brought it and we shared the tube and talked about all the banquets we had ever known, and when we got tired of that we talked about Tommy, and when that failed, Ramona went to the switch and we heard "When a Widow," and that helped for a while, and then we decided that tomorrow we would put off "When a Widow" until bedtime because then we would have something to look forward to all day. Then lunch came and we both wept.

It was not just hunger: after a while the stomach begins to devour itself and the few grams you toss it at mealtimes assuage it so that in time the appetite itself begins to fail. After hunger comes depression. I lay there, still too weak to get about, and in my misery I realised that they could bring me roast pork and watermelon and Boston cream pie without ceasing; they could gratify all my dreams and I would only weep helplessly, because I no longer had the strength to eat. Even then, when I thought I had reached rock bottom, I had not comprehended the worst. I noticed it first in Ramona. Watching her at the mirror, I said, in fear: "You're thinner."

She turned with tears in her eyes. "Nelly, I'm not the only one."

I looked around at my own arms and saw that she was right: there was one less fold of flesh above the elbow; there was one less wrinkle at the wrist. I turned my face to the wall and all Ramona's talk of food and Tommy did not comfort me. In desperation she turned on Tommy's voice, but as he sang I lay back and contemplated the melting of my own flesh.

"If we stole a radio we could hear him again," Ramona said, trying to soothe me. "We could hear him when he sings tonight."

Tommy came to Faircrest on a visit two days later, for reasons that I could not then understand. All the other girls lumbered into the assembly hall to see him, thousands of pounds of agitated flesh. It was that morning that I discovered I could walk again, and I was on my feet, struggling into the pink tent in a fury to get to Tommy, when the matron intercepted me.

"Not you, Nelly."

"I have to get to Tommy. I have to hear him sing."

"Next time, maybe." With a look of naked cruelty she added, "You're a disgrace. You're still too gross."

I lunged, but it was too late; she had already shot the bolt. And so I sat in the midst of my diminishing body, suffering while every other girl in the place listened to him sing. I knew then that I had to act; I would regain myself somehow, I would find food and regain my flesh

and then I would go to Tommy. I would use force if I had to, but I would hear him sing. I raged through the room all that morning, hearing the shrieks of five hundred girls, the thunder of their feet, but even when I pressed myself against the wall I could not hear Tommy's voice.

Yet Ramona, when she came back to the room, said the most interesting thing. It was some time before she could speak at all, but in her generosity she played "When a Widow" while she regained herself, and then she spoke: "He came for something, Nelly. He came for something he didn't find."

"Tell about what he was wearing. Tell what his throat did when he sang."

"He looked at all the *before* pictures, Nelly. The matron was trying to make him look at the *afters* but he kept looking at the *befores* and shaking his head and then he found one and put it in his pocket and if he hadn't found it, he wasn't going to sing."

I could feel my spine stiffen. "Ramona, you've got to help me. I must go to him."

That night we staged a daring break. We clubbed the attendant when he brought dinner, and once we had him under the bed we ate all the chops and gluten bread on his cart and then we went down the corridor, lifting bolts, and when we were a hundred strong we locked the matron in her office and raided the dining hall, howling and eating everything we could find. I ate that night, how I ate, but even as I ate I was aware of a fatal lightness in my bones, a failure in capacity, and so they found me in the frozen food locker, weeping over a chain of link sausage, inconsolable because I understood that they had spoiled it for me, they with their chops and their gluten bread; I could never eat as I once had, I would never be myself again.

In my fury I went after the matron with a ham hock, and when I had them all at bay I took a loin of pork for sustenance and I broke out of that place. I had to get to Tommy before I got any thinner; I had to try. Outside the gate I stopped a car and hit the driver with the loin of pork and then I drove to the Hotel Riverside, where Tommy always stayed. I made my way up the fire stairs on little cat feet and when the valet went to his suite with one of his velveteen suits I followed, quick as a tigress, and the next moment I was inside. When all was quiet I tiptoed to his door and stepped inside.

He was magnificent. He stood at the window, gaunt and beautiful; his blond hair fell to his waist and his shoulders shriveled under a heartbreaking double-breasted pea-green velvet suit. He did not see me at first; I drank in his image and then, delicately, cleared my throat. In the second that he turned and saw me, everything seemed possible.

"It's you." His voice throbbed.

"I had to come."

Our eyes fused and in that moment I believed that we two could meet, burning as a single, lambent flame, but in the next second his face had crumpled in disappointment; he brought a picture from his pocket, a fingered, cracked photograph, and he looked from it to me and back at the photograph, saying, "My darling, you've fallen off."

"Maybe it's not too late," I cried, but we both knew I would fail.

And fail I did, even though I ate for days, for five desperate, heroic weeks; I threw pies into the breach, fresh hams and whole sides of beef, but those sad days at the food farm, the starvation and the drugs have so upset my chemistry that it cannot be restored; no matter what I eat I fall off and I continue to fall off; my body is a halfway house for foods I can no longer assimilate. Tommy watches, and because he knows he almost had me, huge and round and beautiful, Tommy mourns. He eats less and less now. He eats like a bird and lately he has refused to sing; strangely, his records have begun to disappear.

And so a whole nation waits.

"I almost had her," he says, when they beg him to resume his midnight shows; he will not sing, he won't talk, but his hands describe the mountain of woman he has longed for all his life.

And so I have lost Tommy, and he has lost me, but I am doing my best to make it up to him. I own Faircrest now, and in the place where Ramona and I once suffered I use my skills on the girls Tommy wants me to cultivate. I can put twenty pounds on a girl in a couple of weeks and I don't mean bloat, I mean solid fat. Ramona and I feed them up and once a week we weigh and I poke the upper arm with a special stick and I will not be satisfied until the stick goes in and does not rebound because all resiliency is gone. Each week I bring out my best and Tommy shakes his head in misery because the best is not yet good enough, none of them are what I once was. But one day the time and the girl will be right — would that it were me — the time and the girl will be right and Tommy will sing again. In the meantime, the whole world waits; in the meantime, in a private wing well away from the others, I keep my special cases; the matron, who grows fatter as I watch her. And Mom. And Dad.

The American G.I. abroad puzzled foreigners by endless insistence on having something in his mouth ... gum, candy, cokes... Time's *cover (May* 15,1950) *pictures the globe sucking on a coke. Love that coke, love that American way of life. Robert Winship Woodruff, coke executive, says, "We're playing the world long." That would seem to be a very small gamble, with the globe itself becoming the cokesucker.*

(McLuhan, The Mechanical Bride)

Kit Reed's 1967 novel The Better Part *(Farrar) was an intense, subjective plunge into the life of the teenage daughter of the supervisor of an institution for troubled girls. As it happens,* I *was the teenage daughter of an institutional supervisor (in what used to be called an orphanage). I* knew *how right the novel was.*

I also know Kit Reed: a quick — slender — tidy woman; a casual-but-good skirt-and-sweater-type New Englander. A former award-winning newspaperwoman, a recent Guggenheim fellow, the first American to receive an Abraham Woursell five-year grant. Married to a warm, witty, pipe-smoking English Professor: three small children, large house, student lodger, frequent houseguests.

I wrote her a bitter admiring letter: how could anyone in her *world know that much about* my *world? She said institutions were institutions, and she had been to a girls' boarding school.*

Inside every thin woman there is a fat woman, screaming ... ?

Gogol's Wife
Tommaso Landolfi

Translated by Wayland Young

At this point, confronted with the whole complicated affair of Nikolai Vassilevitch's wife, I am overcome by hesitation. Have I any right to disclose something which is unknown to the whole world, which my unforgettable friend himself kept hidden from the world (and he had his reasons), and which I am sure will give rise to all sorts of malicious and stupid misunderstandings? Something, moreover, which will very probably offend the sensibilities of all sorts of base, hypocritical people, and possibly of some honest people too, if there are any left? And finally, have I any right to disclose something before which my own spirit recoils, and even tends toward a more or less open disapproval?

But the fact remains that, as a biographer, I have certain firm obligations. Believing as I do that every bit of information about so lofty a genius will turn out to be of value to us and to future generations, I cannot conceal something which in any case has no hope of being judged fairly and wisely until the end of time. Moreover, what right have we to condemn? Is it given to us to know, not only what intimate needs, but even what higher and wider ends may have been served by those very deeds of a lofty genius which perchance may appear to us vile? No indeed, for we understand so little of these privileged natures. "It is true," a great man once said, "that I also have to pee, but for quite different reasons."

But without more ado I will come to what I know beyond doubt, and can prove beyond question, about this controversial matter, which will now — I dare to hope — no longer be so. I will not trouble to recapitulate what is already known of it, since I do not think this should be necessarily at the same time. She could also seem to change studies.

Let me say it at once: Nikolai Vassilevitch's wife was not a woman. Nor was she any sort of human being, nor any sort of living creature at all, whether animal or vegetable (although something of the sort has sometimes been hinted). She was quite simply a balloon. Yes, a balloon; and this will explain the perplexity, or even indignation, of certain biographers who were also the personal friends of the Master, and who complained that, although they often went to his house, they never saw her and "never even heard her voice". From

this they deduced all sorts of dark and disgraceful complications — yes, and criminal ones too. No, gentlemen, everything is always simpler than it appears. You did not hear her voice simply because she could not speak, or to be more exact, she could only speak in certain conditions, as we shall see. And it was always, except once, in tête-à-tête with Nikolai Vassilevitch. So let us not waste time with any cheap or empty refutations but come at once to as exact and complete a description as possible of the being or object in question.

Gogol's so-called wife was an ordinary dummy made of thick rubber, naked at all seasons, buff in tint, or as is more commonly said, flesh-coloured. But since women's skins are not all of the same colour, I should specify that hers was a light-coloured, polished skin, like that of certain brunettes. It, or she, was, it is hardly necessary to add, of feminine sex. Perhaps I should say at once that she was capable of very wide alterations of her attributes without, of course, being able to alter her sex itself. She could sometimes appear to be thin, with hardly any breasts and with narrow hips more like a young lad than a woman, and at other times to be excessively well-endowed or — let us not mince matters — fat. And she often changed the colour of her hair, both on her head and elsewhere on her body, though not necessary at the present stage of development of Gogol in all sorts of other tiny particulars, such as the position of moles, the vitality of the mucous membranes and so forth. She could even to a certain extent change the very colour of her skin. One is faced with the necessity of asking oneself who she really was, or whether it would be proper to speak of a single 'person' — and in fact we shall see that it would be imprudent to press this point.

The cause of these changes, as my readers will already have understood, was nothing else but the will of Nikolai Vassilevitch himself. He would inflate her to a greater or lesser degree, would change her wig and her other tufts of hair, would grease her with ointments and touch her up in various ways so as to obtain more or less the type of woman which suited him at that moment. Following the natural inclinations of his fancy, he even amused himself sometimes by producing grotesque or monstrous forms; as will be readily understood, she became deformed when inflated beyond a certain point or if she remained below a certain pressure.

But Gogol soon tired of these experiments, which he held to be "after all, not very respectful" to his wife, whom he loved in his own way — however inscrutable it may remain to us. He loved her, but which of these incarnations, we may ask ourselves, did he love? Alas, I have already indicated that the end of the present account will furnish some sort of an answer. And how can I have stated above that it was Nikolai Vassilevitch's will which ruled that woman? In a certain sense,

yes, it is true; but it is equally certain that she soon became no longer his slave but his tyrant. And here yawns the abyss, or if you prefer it, the Jaws of Tartarus. But let us not anticipate.

I have said that Gogol obtained with his manipulations *more or less* the type of woman which he needed from time to time. I should add that when, in rare cases, the form he obtained perfectly incarnated his desire, Nikolai Vassilevitch fell in love with it "exclusively," as he said in his own words, and that this was enough to render 'her' stable for a certain time — until he fell out of love with 'her'. I counted no more than three or four of these violent passions — or, as I suppose they would be called today, infatuations — in the life (dare I say in the conjugal life?) of the great writer. It will be convenient to add here that a few years after what one may call his marriage, Gogol had even given a name to his wife. It was Caracas, which is, unless I am mistaken, the capital of Venezuela. I have never been able to discover the reason for this choice: great minds are so capricious!

Speaking only of her normal appearance, Caracas was what is called a fine woman — well built and proportioned in every part. She had every smallest attribute of her sex properly disposed in the proper location. Particularly worthy of attention were her genital organs (if the adjective is permissible in such a context). They were formed by means of ingenious folds in the rubber. Nothing was forgotten, and their operation was rendered easy by various devices, as well as by the internal pressure of the air.

Caracas also had a skeleton, even though a rudimentary one. Perhaps it was made of whalebone. Special care had been devoted to the construction of the thoracic cage, of the pelvic basin and of the cranium. The first two systems were more or less visible in accordance with the thickness of the fatty layer, if I may so describe it, which covered them. It is a great pity that Gogol never let me know the name of the creator of such a fine piece of work. There was an obstinacy in his refusal which was never quite clear to me.

Nikolai Vassilevitch blew his wife up through the anal sphincter with a pump of his own invention, rather like those which you hold down with your two feet and which are used today in all sorts of mechanical workshops. Situated in the anus was a little one-way valve, or whatever the correct technical description would be, like the mitral valve of the heart, which, once the body was inflated, allowed more air to come in but none to go out. To deflate, one unscrewed a stopper in the mouth, at the back of the throat.

And that, I think, exhausts the description of the most noteworthy peculiarities of this being. Unless perhaps I should mention the splendid rows of white teeth which adorned her mouth and the dark

eyes which, in spite of their immobility, perfectly simulated life. Did I say simulate? Good heavens, simulate is not the word! Nothing seems to be the word, when one is speaking of Caracas! Even these eyes could undergo a change of colour, by means of a special process to which, since it was long and tiresome, Gogol seldom had recourse. Finally, I should speak of her voice, which it was only once given to me to hear. But I cannot do that without going more fully into the relationship between husband and wife, and in this I shall no longer be able to answer to the truth of everything with absolute certitude. On my conscience I could not — so confused, both in itself and in my memory, is that which I now have to tell.

Here, then, as they occur to me, are some of my memories.

The first and, as I said, the last time I ever heard Caracas speak to Nikolai Vassilevitch was one evening when we were absolutely alone. We were in the room where the woman, if I may be allowed the expression, lived. Entrance to this room was strictly forbidden to everybody. It was furnished more or less in the Oriental manner, had no windows and was situated in the most inaccessible part of the house. I did know that she could talk, but Gogol had never explained to me the circumstances under which this happened. There were only the two of us, or three, in there. Nikolai Vassilevitch and I were drinking vodka and discussing Butkov's novel. I remember that we left this topic, and he was maintaining the necessity for radical reforms in the laws of inheritance. We had almost forgotten her. It was then that, with a husky and submissive voice, like Venus on the nuptial couch, she said point-blank: "I want to go poo poo."

I jumped, thinking I had misheard, and looked across at her. She was sitting on a pile of cushions against the wall; that evening she was a soft, blonde beauty, rather well-covered. Her expression seemed commingled of shrewdness and slyness, childishness and irresponsibility. As for Gogol, he blushed violently and, leaping on her, stuck two fingers down her throat. She immediately began to shrink and to turn pale; she took on once again that lost and astonished air which was especially hers, and was in the end reduced to no more than a flabby skin on a perfunctory bony armature. Since, for practical reasons which will readily be divined, she had an extraordinarily flexible backbone, she folded up almost in two, and for the rest of the evening she looked up at us from where she had slithered to the floor, in utter abjection.

All Gogol said was: "She only does it for a joke, or to annoy me, because as a matter of fact she does not have such needs." In the presence of other people, that is to say of me, he generally made a point of treating her with a certain disdain.

We went on drinking and talking, but Nikolai Vassilevitch seemed

very much disturbed and absent in spirit. Once he suddenly interrupted what he was saying, seized my hand in his and burst into tears. "What can I do now?" he exclaimed. "You understand, Foma Paskalovitch, that I loved her?"

It is necessary to point out that it was impossible, except by a miracle, ever to repeat any of Caracas' forms. She was a fresh creation every time, and it would have been wasted effort to seek to find again the exact proportions, the exact pressure, and so forth, of a former Caracas. Therefore the plumpish blonde of that evening was lost to Gogol from that time forth forever; this was in fact the tragic end of one of those few loves of Nikolai Vassilevitch, which I described above. He gave me no explanation; he sadly rejected my proffered comfort, and that evening we parted early. But his heart had been laid bare to me in that outburst. He was no longer so reticent with me, and soon had hardly any secrets left. And this, I may say in parenthesis, caused me very great pride.

It seems that things had gone well for the 'couple' at the beginning of their life together. Nikolai Vassilevitch had been content with Caracas and slept regularly with her in the same bed. He continued to observe this custom till the end, saying with a timid smile that no companion could be quieter or less importunate than she. But I soon began to doubt this, especially judging by the state he was sometimes in when he woke up. Then, after several years, their relationship began strangely to deteriorate.

All this, let it be said once and for all, is no more than a schematic attempt at an explanation. About that time the woman actually began to show signs of independence or, as one might say, of autonomy. Nikolai Vassilevitch had the extraordinary impression that she was acquiring a personality of her own, indecipherable perhaps, but still distinct from his, and one which slipped through his fingers. It is certain that some sort of continuity was established between each of her appearances — between all those brunettes, those blondes, those redheads and auburn-headed girls, between those plump, those slim, those dusky or snowy or golden beauties, there was a certain something in common. At the beginning of this chapter I cast some doubt on the propriety of considering Caracas as a unitary personality; nevertheless I myself could not quite, whenever I saw her, free myself of the impression that, however unheard of it may seem, this was fundamentally the same woman. And it may be that this was why Gogol felt he had to give her a name.

An attempt to establish in what precisely subsisted the common attributes of the different forms would be quite another thing. Perhaps it was no more and no less than the creative afflatus of Nikolai Vassilevitch himself. But no, it would have been too singular and

strange if he had been so much divided off from himself, so much averse to himself. Because whoever she was, Caracas was a disturbing presence and even — it is better to be quite clear — a hostile one. Yet neither Gogol nor I ever succeeded in formulating a remotely tenable hypothesis as to her true nature; when I say formulate, I mean in terms which would be at once rational and accessible to all. But I cannot pass over an extraordinary event which took place at this time.

Caracas fell ill of a shameful disease — or rather Gogol did — though he was not then having, nor had he ever had, any contact with other women. I will not even try to describe how this happened, or where the filthy complaint came from; all I know is that it happened. And that my great, unhappy friend would say to me: "So, Foma Paskalovitch, you see what lay at the heart of Caracas; it was the spirit of syphilis."

Sometimes he would even blame himself in a quite absurd manner; he was always prone to self-accusation. This incident was a real catastrophe as far as the already obscure relationship between husband and wife, and the hostile feelings of Nikolai Vassilevitch himself, were concerned. He was compelled to undergo long-drawn-out and painful treatment — the treatment of those days — and the situation was aggravated by the fact that the disease in the woman did not seem to be easily curable.

Gogol deluded himself for some time that, by blowing his wife up and down and furnishing her with the most widely divergent aspects, he could obtain a woman immune from the contagion, but he was forced to desist when no results were forthcoming.

I shall be brief, seeking not to tire my readers, and also because what I remember seems to become more and more confused. I shall therefore hasten to the tragic conclusion. As to this last, however, let there be no mistake. I must once again make it clear that I am very sure of my ground. I was an eyewitness. Would that I had not been!

The years went by. Nikolai Vassilevitch's distaste for his wife became stronger, though his love for her did not show any signs of diminishing. Toward the end, aversion and attachment struggled so fiercely with each other in his heart that he became quite stricken, almost broken up. His restless eyes, which habitually assumed so many different expressions and sometimes spoke so sweetly to the heart of his interlocutor, now almost always shone with a fevered light, as if he were under the effect of a drug. The strangest impulses arose in him, accompanied by the most senseless fears. He spoke to me of Caracas more and more often, accusing her of unthinkable and amazing things. In these regions I could not follow him, since I had but a sketchy acquaintance with his wife, and hardly any intimacy — and above all since my sensibility was so limited compared with his. I

shall accordingly restrict myself to reporting some of his accusations, without reference to my personal impressions.

"Believe it or not, Foma Paskalovitch," he would, for example, often say to me: "Believe it or not, *she's aging!*" Then, unspeakably moved, he would, as was his way, take my hands in his. He also accused Caracas of giving herself up to solitary pleasures, which he had expressly forbidden. He even went so far as to charge her with betraying him, but the things he said became so extremely obscure that I must excuse myself from any further account of them.

One thing that appears certain is that toward the end Caracas, whether aged or not, had turned into a bitter creature, querulous, hypocritical and subject to religious excess. I do not exclude the possibility that she may have had an influence on Gogol's moral position during the last period of his life, a position which is sufficiently well known. The tragic climax came one night quite unexpectedly when Nikolai Vassilevitch and I were celebrating his silver wedding — one of the last evenings we were to spend together. I neither can nor should attempt to set down what it was that led to his decision, at a time when to all appearances he was resigned to tolerating his consort. I know not what new events had taken place that day. I shall confine myself to the facts; my readers must make what they can of them.

That evening Nikolai Vassilevitch was unusually agitated. His distaste for Caracas seemed to have reached an unprecedented intensity. The famous 'pyre of vanities' — the burning of his manuscripts — had already taken place; I should not like to say whether or not at the instigation of his wife. His state of mind had been further inflamed by other causes. As to his physical condition, this was ever more pitiful, and strengthened my impression that he took drugs. All the same, he began to talk in a more or less normal way about Belinsky, who was giving him some trouble with his attacks on the *Selected Correspondence*. Then suddenly, tears rising to his eyes, he interrupted himself and cried out: "No. No. It's too much, too much. I can't go on any longer," as well as other obscure and disconnected phrases which he would not clarify. He seemed to be talking to himself. He wrung his hands, shook his head, got up and sat down again after having taken four or five anxious steps round the room. When Caracas appeared, or rather when we went in to her later in the evening in her Oriental chamber, he controlled himself no longer and began to behave like an old man, if I may so express myself, in his second childhood, quite giving way to his absurd impulses. For instance, he kept nudging me and winking and senselessly repeating: "There she is, Foma Paskalovitch; there she is!" Meanwhile she seemed to look up at us with a disdainful attention.

But behind these 'mannerisms' one could feel in him a real repugnance, a repugnance which had, I suppose, now reached the limits of the endurable. Indeed ...

After a certain time Nikolai Vassilevitch seemed to pluck up courage. He burst into tears, but somehow they were more manly tears. He wrung his hands again, seized mine in his, and walked up and down, muttering: "That's enough! We can't have any more of this. This is an unheard of thing. How can such a thing be happening to me? How can a man be expected to put up with *this*?"

He then leapt furiously upon the pump, the existence of which he seemed just to have remembered, and, with it in his hand, dashed like a whirlwind to Caracas. He inserted the tube in her anus and began to inflate her ... Weeping the while, he shouted like one possessed: "Oh, how I love her, how I love her, my poor, poor darling! ... But she's going to burst! Unhappy Caracas, most pitiable of God's creatures! But die she must!"

Caracas was swelling up. Nikolai Vassilevitch sweated, wept and pumped. I wished to stop him but, I know not why, I had not the courage. She began to become deformed and shortly assumed the most monstrous aspect; and yet she had not given any signs of alarm — she was used to these jokes. But when she began to feel unbearably full, or perhaps when Nikolai Vassilevitch's intentions became plain to her, she took on an expression of bestial amazement, even a little beseeching, but still without losing that disdainful look. She was afraid, she was even committing herself to his mercy, but still she could not believe in the immediate approach of her fate; she could not believe in the frightful audacity of her husband. He could not see her face because he was behind her. But I looked at her with fascination, and did not move a finger.

At last the internal pressure came through the fragile bones at the base of her skull, and printed on her face an indescribable rictus. Her belly, her thighs, her lips, her breasts and what I could see of her buttocks had swollen to incredible proportions. All of a sudden she belched, and gave a long hissing groan; both these phenomena one could explain by the increase in pressure, which had suddenly forced a way out through the valve in her throat. Then her eyes bulged frantically, threatening to jump out of their sockets. Her ribs flared wide apart and were no longer attached to the sternum, and she resembled a python digesting a donkey. A donkey, did I say? An ox! An elephant! At this point I believed her already dead, but Nikolai Vassilevitch sweating, weeping and repeating: "My dearest! My beloved! My best!" continued to pump.

She went off unexpectedly and, as it were, all of a piece. It was not one part of her skin which gave way and the rest which followed,

but her whole surface at the same instant. She scattered in the air. The pieces fell more or less slowly, according to their size, which was in no case above a very restricted one. I distinctly remember a piece of her cheek, with some lip attached, hanging on the corner of the mantelpiece. Nikolai Vassilevitch stared at me like a madman. Then he pulled himself together and, once more with furious determination, he began carefully to collect those poor rags which once had been the shining skin of Caracas, and all of her.

"Goodbye, Caracas," I thought I heard him murmur, "Goodbye! You were too pitiable!" And then suddenly and quite audibly: "The fire! The fire! She too must end up in the fire." He crossed himself — with his left hand, of course. Then, when he had picked up all those shriveled rags, even climbing on the furniture so as not to miss any, he threw them straight on the fire in the hearth, where they began to burn slowly and with an excessively unpleasant smell. Nikolai Vassilevitch, like all Russians, had a passion for throwing important things in the fire.

Red in the face, with an inexpressible look of despair, and yet of sinister triumph too, he gazed on the pyre of those miserable remains. He had seized my arm and was squeezing it convulsively. But those traces of what had once been a being were hardly well alight when he seemed yet again to pull himself together, as if he were suddenly remembering something or taking a painful decision. In one bound he was out of the room.

A few seconds later I heard him speaking to me through the door in a broken, plaintive voice: "Foma Paskalovitch, I want you to promise not to look. *Golubchik,* promise not to look at me when I come in."

I don't know what I answered, or whether I tried to reassure him in any way. But he insisted, and I had to promise him, as if he were a child, to hide my face against the wall and only turn round when he said I might. The door then opened violently and Nikolai Vassilevitch burst into the room and ran to the fireplace.

And here I must confess my weakness, though I consider it justified by the extraordinary circumstances. I looked round before Nikolai Vassilevitch told me I could; it was stronger than me. I was just in time to see him carrying something in his arms, something which he threw on the fire with all the rest, so that it suddenly flared up. At that, since the desire to *see* had entirely mastered every other thought in me, I dashed to the fireplace. But Nikolai Vassilevitch placed himself between me and it and pushed me back with a strength of which I had not believed him capable. Meanwhile the object was burning and giving off clouds of smoke. And before he showed any sign of calming down there was nothing left but a heap of silent ashes.

The true reason why I wished to see was because I had already glimpsed. But it was only a glimpse, and perhaps I should not allow myself to introduce even the slightest element of uncertainty into this true story. And yet, an eyewitness account is not complete without a mention of that which the witness knows with less than complete certainty. To cut a long story short, that something was a baby. Not a flesh and blood baby, of course, but more something in the line of a rubber doll or a model. Something, which, to judge by its appearance, could have been called *Caracas' son.*

Was I mad too? That I do not know, but I do know that this was what I saw, not clearly, but with my own eyes. And I wonder why it was that when I was writing this just now I didn't mention that when Nikolai Vassilevitch came back into the room he was muttering between his clenched teeth: "Him too! Him too!"

And that is the sum of my knowledge of Nikolai Vassilevitch's wife. In the next chapter I shall tell what happened to him afterwards, and that will be the last chapter of his life. But to give an interpretation of his feelings for his wife, or indeed for anything, is quite another and more difficult matter, though I have attempted it elsewhere in this volume, and refer the reader to that modest effort. I hope I have thrown sufficient light on a most controversial question and that I have unveiled the mystery, if not of Gogol, then at least of his wife. In the course of this I have implicitly given the lie to the insensate accusation that he ill-treated or even beat his wife, as well as other like absurdities. And what else can be the goal of a humble biographer such as the present writer but to serve the memory of that lofty genius who is the object of his study?

Take a word, any word. Multiply and prefix it: inter-, multi-, *even* trans-. *They all work: they're with-it because* with *is with-it. (Like: a molecular biopsychologist in a linguistics seminar is* interdisciplinary; *a cinemaphotographer projecting abstract paintings on live dancer/actors moving between sculpture/structures to electronic music — that's* multimedia.) *The last two* SF *Annuals went* international, inter-enclave, *and* inter-*(inner/outer)-space. With no facilities, as yet, to wire-in a light show or even bind-in a Blow-up Pop-out balloon, this time it's* inter-ennial. *Dropping 'The Year's Best' from the title, I no longer have to wait for someone else to reprint first (as with Jarry and Borges in the* 11th) *to include the material freshly surfacing from* avant-garde *and enclave obscurity. (I missed 'Gogol's Wife' in its first English-language publication* — Encounter, 1960 — and *in the 1963 New Directions collection, and found it just last year — thanks to* Playboy's *A. C. Spectorsky, and J. G. Ballard. I do not know when it was first published in Italy.) The road to and from Rome/ London/ Los Angeles/ New York grows shorter by the*

day, and that vital word, multimedia, *is at its popping-oppest in the free-form Anymarn's Land where 'underground' films meet 'plastic' sculpture. As the author of the closest thing to a movie novelisation ('Snow White', not quite based on the Disney film) ever published in* The New Yorker *(an insular periodical which regards Rome as an exurb of New York, and Hollywood as its shopping centre), Donald Barthelme is a fully credited connoisseur of Art/Show/Biz.*

The Balloon
Donald Barthelme

The balloon, beginning at a point on Fourteenth Street, the exact location of which I cannot reveal, expanded northward all one night, while people were sleeping, until it reached the Park. There, I stopped it; at dawn the northernmost edges lay over the Plaza; the free-hanging motion was frivolous and gentle. But experiencing a faint irritation at stopping, even to protect the trees, and seeing no reason the balloon should not be allowed to expand upward, over the parts of the city it was already covering, into the 'air space' to be found there, I asked the engineers to see to it. This expansion took place throughout the morning, soft imperceptible sighing of gas through the valves. The balloon then covered forty-five blocks north-south and an irregular area east-west, as many as six crosstown blocks on either side of the Avenue in some places. That was the situation, then.

But it is wrong to speak of 'situations', implying sets of circumstances leading to some resolution, some escape of tension; there were no situations, simply the balloon hanging there — muted heavy grays and browns for the most part, contrasting with walnut and soft yellows. A deliberate lack of finish, enhanced by skillful installation, gave the surface a rough, forgotten quality; sliding weights on the inside, carefully adjusted, anchored the great, vari-shaped mass at a number of points. Now, we have had a flood of original ideas in all media, works of singular beauty as well as significant milestones in the history of inflation, but at that moment there was only *this balloon,* concrete particular, hanging there.

There were reactions. Some people found the balloon 'interesting'. As a response this seemed inadequate to the immensity of the balloon, the suddenness of its appearance over the city; on the other hand, in the absence of hysteria or other societally-induced anxiety, it must be judged a calm, 'mature' one. There was a certain amount of initial argumentation about the 'meaning' of the balloon; this subsided, because we have learned not to insist on meanings, and they are rarely even looked for now, except in cases involving the simplest, safest phenomena. It was agreed that since the meaning of the balloon could never be known absolutely, extended discussion was pointless, or at least less meaningful than the activities of those who, for example, hung green and blue paper lanterns from the warm gray underside, in certain streets, or seized the occasion to write messages on the surface, announcing their availability for the performance of

unnatural acts, or the availability of acquaintances.

Daring children jumped, especially at those points where the balloon hovered close to a building, so that the gap between balloon and building was a matter of a few inches, or points where the balloon actually made contact, exerting an ever-so-slight pressure against the side of a building, so that balloon and building seemed a unity. The upper surface was so structured that a 'landscape' was presented, small valleys as well as slight knolls, or mounds; once atop the balloon, a stroll was possible, or even a trip, from one place to another. There was pleasure in being able to run down an incline, then up the opposing slope, both gently graded, or in making a leap from one side to the other. Bouncing was possible, because of the pneumaticity of the surface, and even falling, if that was your wish. That all these varied motions, as well as others, were within one's possibilities, in experiencing the 'up' side of the balloon, was extremely exciting for children, accustomed to the city's flat, hard skin. But the purpose of the balloon was not to amuse children.

Too, the number of people, children and adults, who took advantage of the opportunities described was not so large as it might have been: a certain timidity, lack of trust in the balloon, was seen. There was, furthermore, some hostility. Because we had hidden the pumps, which fed helium to the interior, and because the surface was so vast that the authorities could not determine the point of entry — that is, the point at which the gas was injected — a degree of frustration was evidenced by those city officers into whose province such manifestations normally fell. The apparent purposelessness of the balloon was vexing (as was the fact that it was 'there' at all). Had we painted, in great letters, 'LABORATORY TESTS PROVE' or '18% MORE EFFECTIVE' on the sides of the balloon, this difficulty would have been circumvented, but I could not bear to do so. On the whole, these officers were remarkably tolerant, considering the dimensions of the anomaly, this tolerance being the result of, first, secret tests conducted by night that convinced them that little or nothing could be done in the way of removing or destroying the balloon, and, secondly, a public warmth that arose (not uncoloured by touches of the aforementioned hostility) toward the balloon, from ordinary citizens.

As a single balloon must stand for a lifetime of thinking about balloons, so each citizen expressed, in the attitude he chose, a complex of attitudes. One man might consider that the balloon had to do with the notion *sullied,* as in the sentence *The big balloon sullied the otherwise clear and radiant Manhattan sky*. That is, the balloon was, in this man's view, an imposture, something inferior to the sky that had formerly been there, something interposed between the people and their 'sky'. But in fact it was January, the sky was dark and ugly; it

was not a sky you could look up into, lying on your back in the street, with pleasure, unless pleasure, for you, proceeded from having been threatened, from having been misused. And the underside of the balloon, by contrast, was a pleasure to look up into — we had seen to that. Muted grays and browns for the most part, contrasted with walnut and soft, forgotten yellows. And so, while this man was thinking *sullied,* still there was an admixture of pleasurable cognition in his thinking, struggling with the original perception.

Another man, on the other hand, might view the balloon as if it were part of a system of unanticipated rewards, as when one's employer walks in and says, "Here, Henry, take this package of money I have wrapped for you, because we have been doing so well in the business here, and I admire the way you bruise the tulips, without which bruising your department would not be a success, or at least not the success that it is." For this man the balloon might be a brilliantly heroic 'muscle and pluck' experience, even if an experience poorly understood.

Another man might say, "Without the example of ___ it is doubtful that ___ would exist today in its present form," and find many to agree with him, or to argue with him. Ideas of 'bloat' and 'float' were introduced, as well as concepts of dream and responsibility. Others engaged in remarkably detailed fantasies having to do with a wish either to lose themselves in the balloon, or to engorge it. The private character of these wishes, of their origins, deeply buried and unknown, was such that they were not much spoken of; yet there is evidence that they were widespread. It was also argued that what was important was what you felt when you stood under the balloon; some people claimed that they felt sheltered, warmed, as never before, while enemies of the balloon, felt, or reported feeling, constrained, a 'heavy' feeling.

Critical opinion was divided:

"monstrous pourings"

"harp"

XXXXXXX "certain contrasts with darker portions"

"inner joy"

"large, square corners"

"conservative eclecticism that has so far governed modern balloon design"

::::::: "abnormal vigor"

"warm, soft, lazy passages"

"Has unity been sacrificed for a sprawling quality?"

"Quelle catastrophe!"

"munching"

People began, in a curious way, to locate themselves in relation to aspects of the balloon: "I'll be at that place where it dips down into Forty-seventh Street almost to the sidewalk, near the Alamo Chile House," or "Why don't we go stand on top, and take the air, and maybe walk about a bit, where it forms a tight, curving line with the façade of the Gallery of Modern Art — " Marginal intersections offered entrances within a given time duration, as well as 'warm, soft, lazy passages' in which ... But it is wrong to speak of 'marginal intersections'. Each intersection was crucial, none could be ignored (as if, walking there, you might not find someone capable of turning your attention, in a flash, from old exercises to new exercises). Each intersection was crucial, meeting of balloon and building, meeting of balloon and man, meeting of balloon and balloon.

It was suggested that what was admired about the balloon was finally this: that it was not limited, or defined. Sometimes a bulge, blister, or sub-section would carry all the way east to the river on its own initiative, in the manner of an army's movements on a map, as seen in a headquarters remote from the fighting. Then that part would be, as it were, thrown back again, or would withdraw into new dispositions; the next morning, that part would have made another sortie, or disappeared altogether. This ability on the part of the balloon to shift its shape, to change, was very pleasing, especially to people whose lives were rather rigidly patterned, persons to whom change, although desired, was not available. The balloon, for the twenty-two days of its existence, offered the possibility, in its randomness, of getting lost, of losing oneself, in contradistinction to the grid of precise, rectangular pathways under our feet. The amount of specialised training currently needed, and the consequent desirability of long-term commitments, has been occasioned by the steadily growing importance of complex machinery, in virtually all kinds of operations; as this tendency increases, more and more people will turn, in bewildered inadequacy, to solutions for which the balloon may stand as a prototype, or 'rough draft'.

I met you under the balloon, on the occasion of your return from Norway. You asked if it was mine; I said it was. The balloon, I said, is a spontaneous autobiographical disclosure, having to do with the unease I felt at your absence, and with sexual deprivation, but now that your visit to Bergen has been terminated, it is no longer necessary or appropriate. Removal of the balloon was easy; trailer trucks carried away the depleted fabric, which is now stored in West Virginia, awaiting some other time of unhappiness, sometime, perhaps, when we are angry with one another.

Landscape is a formalisation of space and time. External landscapes

directly reflect interior states of mind — in fact the only external landscapes which have any meaning are those which are reflected in the central nervous system by their direct analogues. I think Dali said somewhere that "mind is a state of landscape," and I think this is completely true.

This was J. G. Ballard, in an interview on the BBC, speaking about one of his highly controversial new 'condensed novels', 'You and Me and the Continuum' (recently reprinted in England Swings SF, *Doubleday, 1968; another, 'You: Coma: Marilyn Monroe', is included in this volume). But his preoccupation with landscape, not as background only, but as an aspect of characterisation — not as* medium *but as* message *— has been integral to his work from the beginning: his first story, 'Prima Belladonna' (1956; most recently in* SF: The Best of the Best, *Delacorte, 1967), like 'Cloud Sculptors', was set in the oddly timeless brilliance of Vermilion Sands ...*

The Cloud-Sculptors of Coral D
J. G. Ballard

All summer the cloud-sculptors would come from Vermilion Sands and sail their painted gliders above the coral towers that rose like white pagodas beside the highway to Lagoon West. The tallest of the towers was Coral D, and here the rising air above the sand-reefs was topped by swan-like clumps of fair-weather cumulus. Lifted on the shoulders of the air above the crown of Coral D, we would carve sea-horses and unicorns, the portraits of presidents and film-stars, lizards and exotic birds. As the crowd watched from their cars, a cool rain would fall on to the dusty roofs, weeping from the sculptured clouds as they sailed across the desert floor towards the sun.

Of all the cloud-sculptures we were to carve, the strangest were the portraits of Leonora Chanel. As I look back to that afternoon last summer when she first came in her white limousine to watch the cloud-sculptors of Coral D, I know we barely realised how seriously this beautiful but insane woman regarded the sculptures floating above her in that calm sky. Later her portraits, carved in the whirlwind, were to weep their storm-rain upon the corpses of their sculptors.

I had arrived in Vermilion Sands three months earlier. A retired pilot, I was painfully coming to terms with a broken leg and the prospect of never flying again. Driving into the desert one day, I stopped near the coral towers on the highway to Lagoon West. As I gazed at these immense pagodas stranded on the floor of this fossil sea, I heard music coming from a sand-reef two hundred yards away. Swinging on my crutches across the sliding sand, I found a shallow basin among the dunes where sonic statues had run to seed beside a ruined studio. The owner had gone, abandoning the hangar-like building to the sandrays and the desert, and on some half-formed impulse I began to drive out each afternoon. From the lathes and joists left behind I built my first giant kites and, later, gliders with cockpits. Tethered by their cables, they would hang above me in the afternoon air like amiable ciphers.

One evening, as I wound the gliders down on to the winch, a sudden gale rose over the crest of Coral D. While I grappled with the whirling handle, trying to anchor my crutches in the sand, two figures approached across the desert floor. One was a small hunchback with a child's overlit eyes and a deformed jaw twisted like an anchor barb to

one side. He scuttled over to the winch and wound the tattered gliders towards the ground, his powerful shoulders pushing me aside. He helped me on to my crutches and peered into the hangar. Here my most ambitious glider to date, no longer a kite but a sail-plane with elevators and control lines, was taking shape on the bench.

He spread a large hand over his chest. "Petit Manuel — acrobat and weight-lifter. Nolan!" he bellowed. "Look at this!" His companion was squatting by the sonic statues, twisting their helixes so that their voices became more resonant. "Nolan's an artist," the hunchback confided to me. "He'll build you gliders like condors."

The tall man was wandering among the gliders, touching their wings with a sculptor's hand. His morose eyes were set in a face like a bored Gaugin's. He glanced at the plaster on my leg and my faded flying jacket, and gestured at the gliders. "You've given a cockpit to them, major." The remark contained a complete understanding of my motives. He pointed to the coral towers rising above us into the evening sky. "With silver iodide we could carve the clouds."

The hunchback nodded encouragingly to me, his eyes lit by an astronomy of dreams.

So were formed the cloud-sculptors of Coral D. Although I considered myself one of them, I never flew the gliders, but I taught Nolan and little Manuel to fly, and later, when he joined us, Charles Van Eyck. Nolan had found this blond-haired pirate of the café terraces in Vermilion Sands, a laconic teuton with droll eyes and a weak mouth, and brought him out to Coral D when the season ended and the well-to-do tourists and their nubile daughters returned to Red Beach. "Major Parker — Charles Van Eyck. He's a head-hunter," Nolan commented with cold humour," — maidenheads." Despite their uneasy rivalry I realised that Van Eyck would give our group a useful dimension of glamour.

From the first I suspected that the studio in the desert was Nolan's, and that we were all serving some private whim of this dark-haired solitary. At the time, however, I was more concerned with teaching them to fly — first on cable, mastering the updraughts that swept the stunted turret of Coral A, smallest of the towers, then the steeper slopes of B and C, and finally the powerful currents of Coral D. Late one afternoon, when I began to wind them in, Nolan cut away his line. The glider plummeted onto its back, diving down to impale itself on the rock spires. I flung myself to the ground as the cable whipped across my car, shattering the windshield. When I looked up, Nolan was soaring high in the tinted air above Coral D. The wind, guardian of the coral towers, carried him through the islands of cumulus that veiled the evening light.

As I ran to the winch, the second cable went, and little Manuel swerved away to join Nolan. Ugly crab on the ground, in the air the hunchback became a bird with immense wings, outflying both Nolan and Van Eyck. I watched them as they circled the coral towers, and then swept down together over the desert floor, stirring the sandrays into soot-like clouds. Petit Manuel was jubilant. He strutted around me like a pocket Napoleon, contemptuous of my broken leg, scooping up handfuls of broken glass and tossing them over his head like bouquets to the air.

Two months later, as we drove out to Coral D on the day we were to meet Leonora Chanel, something of this first feeling of exhilaration had faded. Now that the season had ended few tourists travelled to Lagoon West, and often we would perform our cloud-sculpture to the empty highway. Sometimes Nolan would remain behind in his hotel, drinking by himself on the bed, or Van Eyck would disappear for several days with some widow or divorcée, and Petit Manuel and I would go out alone.

Nonetheless, as the four of us drove out in my car that afternoon and saw the clouds waiting for us above the spire of Coral D, all my depression and fatigue vanished. Ten minutes later the three cloud-gliders rose into the air and the first cars began to stop on the highway. Nolan was in the lead in his black-winged glider, climbing straight to the crown of Coral D two hundred feet above, while Van Eyck soared to and fro below, showing his blond mane to a middle-aged woman in a topaz convertible. Behind them came little Manuel, his candy-striped wings slipping and churning in the disturbed air. Shouting happy obscenities, he flew with his twisted knees, huge arms gesticulating out of the cockpit.

The three gliders, brilliant painted toys, revolved like lazing birds above Coral D, waiting for the first clouds to pass overhead. Van Eyck moved away to take a cloud. He sailed around its white pillow, spraying the sides with iodide crystals and cutting away the flock-like tissue. The steaming shards fell towards us like crumbling ice-drifts. As the drops of condensing spray fell on my face, I could see Van Eyck shaping an immense horse's head. He sailed up and down the long forehead and chiselled out the eyes and ears.

As always, the people watching from their cars seemed to enjoy this piece of aerial marzipan. It sailed overhead, carried away on the wind from Coral D. Van Eyck followed it down, wings lazing around the equine head. Meanwhile Petit Manuel worked away at the next cloud. As he sprayed its sides, a familiar human head appeared through the tumbling mist. The high wavy mane, strong jaw but slipped mouth Manuel caricatured from the cloud with a series of deft

passes, wing-tips almost touching each other as he dived in and out of the portrait.

The glossy white head, an unmistakable parody of Van Eyck in his own worst style, crossed the highway towards Vermilion Sands. Manuel slid out of the air, stalling his glider to a landing beside my car as Van Eyck stepped from his cockpit with a forced smile.

We waited for the third display. A cloud formed over Coral D, within a few minutes had blossomed into a pristine fair-weather cumulus. As it hung there Nolan's black-winged glider plunged out of the sun. He soared around the cloud, cutting away its tissues. The soft fleece fell towards us in a cool rain.

There was a shout from one of the cars. Nolan turned from the cloud, his wings slipping as if unveiling his handiwork. Illuminated by the afternoon sun was the serene face of a three-year old child. Its wide cheeks framed a placid mouth and plump chin. As one or two people clapped, Nolan sailed over the cloud and rippled the roof into ribbons and curls.

However, I knew that the real climax was yet to come. Cursed by some malignant virus, Nolan seemed unable to accept his own handiwork, always destroying it with the same cold humour. Petit Manuel had thrown away his cigarette, and even Van Eyck had turned his attention from the women in the cars.

Nolan soared above the child's face, following like a matador waiting for the moment of the kill. There was silence for a minute as he worked away at the cloud, and then someone slammed a car door in disgust.

Hanging above us was the white image of a skull.

The child's face, converted by a few strokes, had vanished, but in the notched teeth and gaping orbits, large enough to hold a car, we could still see an echo of its infant features. The spectre moved past us, the spectators frowning at this weeping skull whose rain fell upon their faces.

Half-heartedly I picked my old flying helmet off the back seat and began to carry it around the cars. Two of the spectators drove off before I could reach them. As I hovered about uncertainly, wondering why on earth a retired and well-to-do Air Force officer should be trying to collect these few dollar bills, Van Eyck stepped behind me and took the helmet from my hand.

"Not now, major. Look at what arrives — my apocalypse ... "

A white Rolls-Royce, driven by a chauffeur in braided cream livery, had turned off the highway. Through the tinted communication window a young woman in a secretary's day suit spoke to the chauffeur. Beside her, a gloved hand still holding the window strap, a

white-haired woman with jewelled eyes gazed up at the circling wings of the cloud-glider. Her strong and elegant face seemed sealed within the dark glass of the limousine like the enigmatic madonna of some marine grotto.

Van Eyck's glider rose into the air, soaring upwards to the cloud that hung above Coral D. I walked back to my car, searching the sky for Nolan. Above, Van Eyck was producing a pastiche Mona Lisa, a picture postcard gioconda as authentic as a plaster virgin. Its glossy finish shone in the overbright sunlight as if enamelled together out of some cosmetic foam.

Then Nolan dived from the sun behind Van Eyck. Rolling his black-winged glider past Van Eyck's, he drove through the neck of the gioconda, and with the flick of a wing toppled the broadcheeked head. It fell towards the cars below. The features disintegrated into a flaccid mess, sections of the nose and jaw tumbling through the steam. Then wings brushed. Van Eyck fired his spray gun at Nolan, and there was a flurry of torn fabric. Van Eyck fell from the air, steering his glider down to a broken landing.

I ran over to him. "Charles, do you have to play Von Richthofen? For God's sake, leave each other alone!"

Van Eyck waved me away. "Talk to Nolan, major. I'm not responsible for his air piracy." He stood in the cockpit, gazing over the cars as the shreds of fabric fell around him.

I walked back to my car, deciding that the time had come to disband the cloud-sculptors of Coral D. Fifty yards away the young secretary in the Rolls-Royce had stepped from the car and beckoned to me. Through the open door her mistress watched me with her jewelled eyes. Her white hair lay in a coil over one shoulder like a nacreous serpent.

I carried my flying helmet down to the young woman. Above a high forehead her auburn hair was swept back in a defensive bun, as if she were deliberately concealing part of herself. She stared with puzzled eyes at the helmet held out in front of her.

"I don't want to fly — what is it?"

"A grace," I explained. "For the repose of Michelangelo, Ed Keinholz and the cloud-sculptors of Coral D."

"Oh, my God. I think the chauffeur's the only one with any *money*. Look, do you perform anywhere else?"

"Perform?" I glanced from this pretty and agreeable young woman to the pale chimera with jewelled eyes in the dim compartment of the Rolls. She was watching the headless figure of the Mona Lisa as it moved across the desert floor towards Vermilion Sands. "We're not a professional troupe, as you've probably guessed. And obviously we'd need some fair-weather cloud. Where, exactly?"

"At Lagoon West." She took a snake-skinned diary from her handbag. "Miss Chanel is holding a series of garden parties. She wondered if you'd care to perform. Of course there would be a large fee."

"Chanel ... Leonora Chanel, the ... ?"

The young woman's face again took on its defensive posture, dissociating her from whatever might follow. "Miss Chanel is at Lagoon West for the summer. By the way, there's one condition I must point out — Miss Chanel will provide the sole subject matter. You do understand?"

Fifty yards away Van Eyck was dragging his damaged glider towards my car. Nolan had landed, a caricature of Cyrano abandoned in mid-air. Petit Manuel limped to and fro, gathering together the equipment. In the fading afternoon light they resembled a threadbare circus troupe.

"All right," I agreed. "I take your point. But what about the clouds, Miss — ?"

"Lafferty. Beatrice Lafferty. Miss Chanel will provide the clouds."

I walked around the cars with the helmet, then divided the money between Nolan, Van Eyck and Manuel. They stood in the gathering dusk, the few bills in their hands, watching the highway below.

Leonora Chanel stepped from the limousine and strolled into the desert. Her white-haired figure in its cobra-skinned coat wandered among the dunes. Sandrays lifted around her, disturbed by the random movements of this sauntering phantasm of the burnt afternoon. Ignoring their open stings around her legs, she was gazing up at the aerial bestiary dissolving in the sky, and at the white skull a mile away over Lagoon West that had smeared itself across the sky.

At the time I first saw her, watching the cloud-sculptors of Coral D, I had only a half-formed impression of Leonora Chanel. The daughter of one of the world's leading financiers, she was an heiress both in her own right and on the death of her husband, a shy Monacan aristocrat, Comte Louis Chanel. The mysterious circumstances of his death at Cap Ferrat on the Riviera, officially described as suicide, had placed Leonora in a spotlight of publicity and gossip. She had escaped by wandering endlessly across the globe, from her walled villa in Tangier to an Alpine mansion in the snows above Pontresina, and from there to Palm Springs, Seville and Mykonos.

During these years of exile something of her character emerged from the magazine and newspaper photographs: moodily visiting a Spanish charity with the Duchess of Alba, or seated with Saroya and

other members of café society on the terrace of Dali's villa at Port Lligat, her self-regarding face gazing out with its jewelled eyes at the diamond sea of the Costa Brava.

Inevitably her Garbo-like role seemed over-calculated, forever undermined by the suspicions of her own hand in her husband's death. The Count had been an introspective playboy who piloted his own aircraft to archaeological sites in the Peloponnese and whose mistress, a beautiful young Lebanese, was one of the world's pre-eminent keyboard interpreters of Bach. Why this reserved and pleasant man should have committed suicide was never made plain. What promised to be a significant exhibit at the coroner's inquest, a mutilated easel portrait of Leonora on which he was working, was accidentally destroyed before the hearing. Perhaps the painting revealed more of Leonora's character than she chose to see.

A week later, as I drove out to Lagoon West on the morning of the first garden party, I could well understand why Leonora Chanel had come to Vermilion Sands, to this bizarre, sand-bound resort with its lethargy, beach fatigue and shifting perspectives. Sonic statues grew wild along the beach, their voices keening as I swept past along the shore road. The fused silica on the surface of the lake formed an immense rainbow mirror that reflected the deranged colours of the sand-reefs, more vivid even than the cinnabar and cyclamen wing-panels of the cloud-gliders overhead. They soared in the sky above the lake like fitful dragonflies as Nolan, Van Eyck and Petit Manuel flew them from Coral D.

We had entered an inflamed landscape. Half a mile away the angular cornices of the summer house jutted into the vivid air as if distorted by some faulty junction of time and space. Behind it, like an exhausted volcano, a broad-topped mesa rose into the glazed air, its shoulders lifting the thermal currents high off the heated lake.

Envying Nolan and little Manuel these tremendous updraughts, more powerful than any we had known at Coral D, I drove towards the villa. Then the haze cleared along the beach and I saw the clouds.

A hundred feet above the roof of the mesa, they hung like the twisted pillows of a sleepless giant. Columns of turbulent air moved within the clouds, boiling upwards to the anvil heads like liquid in a cauldron. These were not the placid, fair-weather cumulus of Coral D, but storm-nimbus, unstable masses of overheated air that could catch an aircraft and lift it a thousand feet in a few seconds. Here and there the clouds were rimmed with dark bands, their towers crossed by valleys and ravines. They moved across the villa, concealed from the lakeside heat by the haze overhead, then dissolved in a series of violent shifts in the disordered air.

As I entered the drive behind a truck filled with *son et lumière* equipment, a dozen members of the staff were straightening lines of gilt chairs on the terrace and unrolling panels of a marquee.

Beatrice Lafferty stepped across the cables. "Major Parker — there are the clouds we promised you."

I looked up again at the dark billows hanging like shrouds above the white villa. "Clouds, Beatrice? Those are tigers, tigers with wings. We're manicurists of the air, not dragon-tamers."

"Don't worry, a manicure is exactly what you're expected to carry out." With an arch glance, she added: "Your men do understand that there's to be only one subject?"

"Miss Chanel herself? Of course." I took her arm as we walked towards the balcony overlooking the lake. "You know, I think you enjoy these snide asides. Let the rich choose their materials — marble, bronze, plasma or cloud. Why not? Portraiture has always been a neglected art."

"My God, not here," She waited until a steward passed with a tray of table-cloths. "Carving one's portrait in the sky out of the sun and air — some people might say that smacked of vanity, or even worse sins."

"You're very mysterious. Such as?"

She played games with her eyes. "I'll tell you in a month's time when my contract expires. Now, when are your men coming?"

"They're here." I pointed to the sky over the lake. The three gliders hung in the overheated air, clumps of cloud-cotton drifting past them to dissolve in the haze. They were following a sand-yacht that approached the quay, its tyres throwing up the cerise dust. Behind the helmsman sat Leonora Chanel in a trouser suit of yellow alligator skin, her white hair hidden inside a black raffia toque.

As the helmsman moored the craft, Van Eyck and Petit Manuel put on an impromptu performance, shaping the fragments of cloud-cotton a hundred feet above the lake. First Van Eyck carved an orchid, then a heart and a pair of lips, while Manuel fashioned the head of a parakeet, two identical mice and the letters 'L.C.' As they dived and plunged around her, their wings sometimes touching the lake, Leonora stood on the quay, politely waving at each of these brief confections.

When they landed beside the quay, Leonora waited for Nolan to take one of the clouds, but he was sailing up and down the lake in front of her like a weary bird. Watching this strange chatelaine of Lagoon West;, I noticed that she had slipped off into some private reverie, her gaze fixed on Nolan and oblivious of the people around her. Memories, caravels without sails, crossed the shadowy deserts of her burnt-out eyes.

Later that evening Beatrice Lafferty led me into the villa through the library window. There, as Leonora greeted her guests on the terrace, wearing a topless dress of sapphires and organdy, her breasts covered only by their contour jewellery, I saw the portraits that filled the villa. I counted more than twenty, from the formal society portraits in the drawing rooms, one by the President of the Royal Academy, another by Annigoni, to the bizarre psychological studies in the bar and dining room by Dali and Francis Bacon. Everywhere we moved, in the alcoves between the marble semi-columns, in gilt miniatures on the mantel shelves, even in the ascending mural that followed the staircase, we saw the same beautiful, self-regarding face. This colossal narcissism seemed to have become her last refuge, the only retreat for her fugitive self in its flight from the world.

Then, in the studio on the roof, we, came across a large easel portrait that had just been varnished. The artist had produced a deliberate travesty of the sentimental and powder-blue tints of a fashionable society painter, but beneath this gloss he had visualised Leonora as a dead Medea. The stretched skin below her right cheek, the sharp forehead and slipped mouth gave her the numbed and luminous appearance of a corpse.

My eyes moved to the signature. "Nolan! My God, were you here when he painted this?"

"It was finished before I came — two months ago. She refused to have it framed."

"No wonder." I went over to the window and looked down at the bedrooms hidden behind their awnings. "Nolan was *here*. The old studio near Coral D is his."

"But why should Leonora ask him back? They must have — "

"To paint her portrait again. I know Leonoara Chanel better than you do, Beatrice. This time, though, the size of the sky."

We left the library and walked past the cocktails and canapes to where Leonora was welcoming her guests. Nolan stood beside her, wearing a suit of white suede. Now and then he looked down at her as if playing with the possibilities this self-obsessed woman gave to his macabre humour. Leonora clutched at his elbow. With the diamonds fixed around her eyes she reminded me of some archaic priestess. Beneath the contour jewellery her breasts lay like eager snakes.

Van Eyck introduced himself with an exaggerated bow. Behind him came Petit Manuel, his twisted head ducking nervously among the tuxedos.

Leonora's mouth shut in a rictus of distaste. She glanced at the white plaster on my foot. "Nolan, you fill your world with cripples. Your little dwarf — will he fly too?"

Petit Manuel looked at her with eyes like crushed flowers.

The performance began an hour later. The dark-rimmed clouds were lit by the sun setting behind the mesa, the air crossed by wraiths of cirrus like the gilded frames of the immense paintings to come. Van Eyck's glider rose in a spiral towards the face of the first clouds, stalling and climbing again as the turbulent updraughts threw him across the air.

As the cheekbones began to appear, as smooth and lifeless as carved foam, applause rang out from the guests seated on the terrace. Five minutes later, when Van Eyck's glider swooped down onto the lake, I could see that he had excelled himself. Lit by the searchlights, and with the overture to Tristan sounding from the loudspeaker on the slopes of the mesa, as if inflating this huge bauble, the portrait of Leonora moved overhead, a faint rain falling from it. By luck the cloud remained stable until it passed the shoreline, and then broke up in the evening air as if ripped from the sky by an irritated hand.

Petit Manuel began his ascent, sailing in on a dark-edged cloud like an urchin accosting a bad-tempered matron. He soared to and fro, as if unsure how to shape this unpredictable column of vapour, then began to carve it into the approximate contours of a woman's head. He seemed more nervous than I had ever seen him. As he finished a second round of applause broke out, soon followed by laughter and ironic cheers.

The cloud, sculptured into a flattering likeness of Leonora, had begun to tilt, rotating in the disturbed air. The jaw lengthened, the glazed smile became that of an idiot's. Within a minute the gigantic head of Leonora Chanel hung upside down above us.

Discreetly I ordered the searchlights switched off, and the audience's attention turned to Nolan's black-winged glider as it climbed towards the next cloud. Shards of dissolving tissue fell from the darkening air, the spray concealing whatever ambiguous creation Nolan was carving. To my surprise, the portrait that emerged was wholly lifelike. There was a burst of applause, a few bars of Tannhauser, and the searchlights lit up the elegant head. Standing among her guests, Leonora raised her glass to Nolan's glider.

Puzzled by Nolan's generosity, I looked more closely at the gleaming face, and then realised what he had done. The portrait, with cruel irony, was all too lifelike. The downward turn of Leonora's mouth, the chin held up to smooth her neck, the fall of flesh below her right cheek — all these were carried on the face of the cloud as they had been in his painting in the studio.

Around Leonora the guests were congratulating her on the performance. She was looking up at her portrait as it began to break up over the lake, seeing it for the first time. The veins held the blood

in her face.

Then a fireworks display on the beach blotted out these ambiguities in its pink and blue explosions.

Shortly before dawn Beatrice Lafferty and I walked along the beach among the shells of burnt-out rockets and Catherine wheels. On the deserted terrace a few lights shone through the darkness onto the scattered chairs. As we reached the steps, a woman's voice cried out somewhere above us. There was the sound of smashed glass. A french window was kicked back, and a dark-haired man in a white suit ran between the tables.

As Nolan disappeared along the drive, Leonora Chanel walked out into the centre of the terrace. She looked at the dark clouds surging over the mesa, and with one hand tore the jewels from her eyes. They lay winking on the tiles at her feet. Then the hunched figure of Petit Manuel leapt from his hiding place in the bandstand. He scuttled past, racing on his bent legs.

An engine started by the gates. Leonora began to walk back to the villa, staring at her broken reflections in the glass below the window. She stopped as a tall, blond-haired man with cold and eager eyes stepped from the sonic statues outside the library Disturbed by the noise, the statues had begun to whine. As Van Eyck moved towards Leonora they took up the slow beat of his steps.

The next day's performance was the last by the cloud-sculptors of Coral D. All afternoon, before the guests arrived, a dim light lay over the lake. Immense tiers of storm-nimbus were massing behind the mesa, and any performance at all seemed unlikely.

Van Eyck was with Leonora, As I arrived Beatrice Lafferty was watching their sand-yacht carry them unevenly across the lake.

"There's no sign of Nolan or little Manuel," she told me. "The party starts in three hours."

I took her arm. "The party's already over. When you're finished here, Bea, come and live with me at Coral D. I'll teach you to sculpt the clouds."

Van Eyck and Leonora came ashore half an hour later. Van Eyck stared through my face as he brushed past. Leonora clung to his arm, the day-jewels around her eyes scattering their hard light across the terrace.

By eight, when the first guests began to appear, Nolan and Petit Manuel had still not arrived. On the terrace the evening was warm and lamplit, but overhead the storm clouds sidled past each other like uneasy giants. I walked up the slope to where the gliders were tethered. Their wings shivered in the updraughts.

Barely half a minute after he rose into the darkening air, dwarfed by an immense tower of storm-nimbus, Charles Van Eyck was spinning towards the ground, his glider toppled by the crazed air. He recovered fifty feet from the villa and climbed on the updraughts from the lake, well away from the spreading chest of the cloud. He soared in again. As Leonora and her guests watched from their seats, the glider was hurled back over their heads in an explosion of vapour, then fell towards the lake with a broken wing.

I walked towards Leonora. Standing by the balcony were Nolan and Petit Manuel, watching Van Eyck climb from the cockpit of his glider three hundred yards away.

To Nolan I said: "Why bother to come? Don't tell me you're going to fly?"

Nolan leaned against the rail, hands in the pockets of his suit. "I'm not — that's exactly why I'm here, major."

Leonora was wearing an evening dress of peacock feathers that lay around her legs in an immense train. The hundreds of eyes gleamed in the electric air before the storm, sheathing her body in their blue flames.

"Miss Chanel, the clouds are like madmen," I apologised "There's a storm on its way."

She looked up at me with unsettled eyes. "Don't you people expect to take risks?" She gestured at the storm-nimbus that swirled over our heads. "For clouds like these I need a Michelangelo of the sky ... What about Nolan? Is he too frightened as well?"

As she shouted his name, Nolan stared at her, then turned his back to us. The light over Lagoon West had changed. Half the lake was covered by a dim pall.

There was a tug on my sleeve. Petit Manuel looked up at me with his crafty child's eyes. "Raymond, I can go. Let me take the glider."

"Manuel, for God's sake. You'll kill — "

He darted between the gilt chairs. Leonora frowned as he plucked her wrist.

"Miss Chanel ... " His loose mouth formed an encouraging smile. "I'll sculpt for you. Right now, a big storm-cloud, eh?"

She stared down at him, half-repelled by this eager hunchback ogling her among the hundred eyes of her peacock train. Van Eyck was limping back to the beach from his wrecked glider. I guessed that in some strange way Manuel was pitting himself against Van Eyck.

Leonora grimaced, as if swallowing some poisonous phlegm. "Major Parker, tell him to — " She glanced at the dark cloud boiling over the mesa like the effluvium of some black-hearted volcano. "Wait! Let's see what the little cripple can do!" She turned on Manuel with an overbright smile. "Go on, then. Let's see you sculpt a

whirlwind!"

In her face the diagram of bones formed a geometry of murder.

Nolan ran past across the terrace, his feet crushing the peacock feathers as Leonora laughed. We tried to stop Manuel, but he raced up the slope. Stung by Leonora's taunt, he skipped among the rocks, disappearing from sight in the darkening air. On the terrace a small crowd gathered to watch.

The yellow and tangerine glider rose into the sky and climbed across the face of the storm-cloud. Fifty yards from the dark billows it was buffetted by the shifting air, but Manuel soared in and began to cut away at the dark face. Drops of black rain fell across the terrace at our feet.

The first outline of a woman's head appeared, satanic eyes lit by the open vents in the cloud, a sliding mouth like a dark smear as the huge billows boiled forwards. Nolan shouted in warning from the lake as he climbed into his glider. A moment later little Manuel's craft was lifted by a powerful updraught and tossed over the roof of the cloud. Fighting the insane air, Manuel plunged the glider downwards and drove into the cloud again. Then its immense face opened, and in a sudden spasm the cloud surged forward and swallowed the glider.

There was silence on the terrace as the crushed body of the craft revolved in the centre of the cloud. It moved over our heads, dismembered pieces of the wings and fuselage churned about in the dissolving face. As it reached the lake, the cloud began its violent end. Pieces of the face slewed sideways, the mouth was torn off, an eye exploded. It vanished in a last brief squall.

The pieces of Petit Manuel's glider fell from the bright air.

Beatrice Lafferty and I drove across the lake to collect Manuel's body. After the spectacle of this death within the exploding replica of their hostess' face, the guests began to leave. Within minutes the drive was full of cars. Leonora watched them go, standing with Van Eyck among the deserted tables.

Beatrice said nothing as we drove out. The pieces of the shattered glider lay over the fused sand, tags of canvas and broken struts, control lines tied into knots. Then yards from the cockpit I found Petit Manuel's body, lying in a wet ball like a drowned monkey.

I carried him back to the sand-yacht.

"Raymond!" Beatrice pointed to the shore. Storm-clouds were massed along the entire length of the lake, and the first flashes of lightning were striking in the hills behind the mesa. In the electric air the villa had lost its glitter. Half a mile away a tornado was moving along the valley floor, its trunk swaying towards the lake.

The first gusts of air struck the yacht. Beatrice shouted again: "Raymond! Nolan's there — he's flying inside it!"

Then I saw the black-winged glider circling under the umbrella of the tornado, Nolan himself riding in the whirlwind. His wings held steady in the revolving air around the funnel. Like a pilot fish he soared in, as if steering the tornado towards Leonora's villa.

Twenty seconds later, when it struck the house, I lost sight of him. An explosion of dark air overwhelmed the villa, a churning centrifuge of shattered chairs and tiles that burst over the roof. Beatrice and I ran from the yacht, and lay together in a fault in the glass surface. As the tornado moved away, fading into the storm-filled sky, a dark squall hung over the wrecked villa, now and then flicking the debris into the air. Shreds of canvas and peacock feathers fell around us.

We waited half an hour before approaching the house. Hundreds of smashed glasses and broken chairs littered the terrace. At first I could see no signs of Leonora, although her face was everywhere, the portraits with their slashed profiles strewn on the damp tiles. An eddying smile floated towards me from the disturbed air and wrapped itself around my leg.

Leonora's body lay among the broken tables near the bandstand, half-wrapped in a bleeding canvas. Her face was as bruised now as the storm-cloud Manuel had tried to carve.

We found Van Eyck in the wreck of the marquee. He was suspended by the neck from a tangle of electric wiring, his pale face wreathed in a noose of light bulbs. The current flowed intermittently through the wiring, lighting up his strangled eyes.

I leaned against the overturned Rolls, holding Beatrice's shoulders. "There's no sign of Nolan — no pieces of his glider."

"Poor man. Raymond, he was driving that whirlwind here Somehow he was controlling it."

I walked across the damp terrace to where Leonora lay. I began to cover her with the shreds of canvas, the torn faces of herself.

I took Beatrice Lafferty to live with me in Nolan's studio in the desert near Coral D. We heard no more of Nolan, and never flew the gliders again. The clouds carry too many memories. Three months ago a man who saw the derelict gliders outside the studio stopped near Coral D and walked across to us. He told us he had seen a man flying a glider in the sky high above Red Beach, carving the strato-cirrus into images of jewels and children's faces. Once there was a dwarf's head.

On reflection, that sounds rather like Nolan, so perhaps he managed to get away from the tornado. In the evenings Beatrice and I

sit among the sonic statues, listening to their voices as the fair-weather clouds rise above Coral D, waiting for a man in a dark-winged glider, perhaps painted like candy now, who will come in on the wind and carve for us images of sea-horses and unicorns, dwarfs and jewels and children's faces.

After 'Belladonna', four Vermilion Sands stories appeared between 1961 and 1963. Three more (a 'journey of return to that exotic suburb of my mind') were published last year, filling out a book due shortly from Putnam. In all of them, the fabulous character of the landscape was clearly just that: fabulous — yet so familiar too somehow part of my own experience, that I once spent an afternoon poring over Gazettes and Atlases (never thinking to try an Anatomy) until I satisfied myself with a location on, or near, the coast of Guatemala. Apparently other readers were similarly compelled because the author asked me to specify here:

Vermilion Sands is not in Arizona, or anywhere in the USA, nor on another planet, which one or two people over the years have assumed. Also, there is no sea here, although so many of the images are marine — the Beach ambiance, sandrays and reefs. This is a desert area, but so crystallised that it has almost produced a new fauna and flora of its own.

Luana
Gilbert Thomas

After a day of Mycology — my specialty — I would turn to painting, to sculpture. Cutting women out of my life — I had been hurt enough. Art, life's shadow, is not a good substitute, but it would have to do. I'd begun by painting water colours of fungi. Nothing is so lovely as spring lichen spreading across the face of crisp rock, cracking it into sand. Fungi shattering the Parthenon into chips of marble has never failed to amaze me with its power. Thus does beauty become soil. It was after losing my first wife that I turned to sculpture.

Although I had captured the loveliness of Monascus purpureas on canvas, and my shaggymanes in tempera — guarded against decay by infusions of deoxyribonucleic acid, DNA, without which life cannot exist — had been purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in New York for their files.

I wanted to get my hands on something big. Although my first wife had not been large, nor my second. Little women in fact, docile as the gentle morel, delicious fried in butter or added to soups. Evidently they found me more docile still, interested only in my work. That the lowly ubiquitous Penicillium had saved millions and blues cheese gave them no cause to rejoice. They didn't care that man's journey into the expanding universe of the mind is powered by diethylamide tartrate of D-lysergic acid — LSD-25 — rooted in ergot, fungus.

My first wife screwed up her courage to the point of calling me moldy. "You moldy bastard," she said one morning over coffee and figs. I had taken to eating fruit for breakfast after my latest trip to Europe and found it suited my system. "Moldy fig!" our daughter Priscilla shot from the next room — she'd been put up to it, a fat little girl, clinically speaking. Then Elva had gone to the cookie jar and pulled out a sack of glazed doughnuts; and defiantly dumping them on the table was about to eat one when she noted — may God strike me dead — they were moldly. Bursting into tears she ran from the room screaming: "*You did it — you did it!*" I hadn't, of course. The fact is: spore is all around us, ready to feed on anything. Basidiomycetes will feed on solid plastic, changing it into sugar. Elva had waited too long to make her move and the hyphae had taken over.

Picasso is a good sculptor. (A man must have his heroes — particularly when depressed.) I've always enjoyed his goat created at Vallauris in the 50s, using a multiplicity of materials. Whatever came

to hand. Wire, plaster, fruit crates. Finished, he discovered something was missing: the genitalia. His remedy — take an old tin can, flatten it and double it back on itself, then insert it in the moist plaster just below the stiff upturned tail and protruding gaspipe. Daring. I like to think I model myself on that Picasso.

My second wife, the Greek, was dark and dainty but she turned up one morning black and blue. She had taken to staying out overnight without my permission and I had noticed bruises and what appeared to be the marks of teeth on her from time to time. These occurred most usually about the throat with some finding their way down to the breast. Pressed for an explanation she would say she refused to wear glasses and had run into something. When I said it was more likely something had run into her, she asked for a divorce. I didn't remember her as being near-sighted. At the little quayside café at Piraeus she had seen well enough. Well enough to come over and ask: "Aren't you Doctor Raymond Kelpe, the famous mycologist from the United States?" When I said I was, she blushed, saying she was interested in molds herself, was in fact an advanced student specialising in torula as it pertains to cracking oil into food — petro-proteins — at the University of Athens; had actually seen me in lecture and knew I was in town to help save the Parthenon. Which still may be possible; often of a morning I've joined the little workman there on the Acropolis, his cup of cement helping us restore the chips to their historic position.

Pallas became my assistant, warning me to beware of the "I love you, *kiss* — ing" girls of Athens; and to make sure that I did, seduced me. It was simple in the laboratory, for I often work late. We were among the trays of saprophytes, which had just hatched — you could actually see the little *champignons* rise from their beds of crushed acorn, dead leaves, and coffee grounds lightly laced with *merde*. There in the moist scented air — for the little tan fruit has a delicious odour — she reached for a retort and fainted. Falling on a soft bed of mushrooms six feet long. Her laboratory dress, buttoned down the front, was somewhat askew, and as I bent to lend mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, she moaned.

We were married; and it was soon after arriving back in the United States that I noticed she was spending more and more time away from me — in the company of Dr. Gilroy Mannfried, doing research in parasurgery in Building 29. I am in Building 28. Although still my assistant, Pallas said she was sick of it and wanted to go back to Greece where the light was right, that she was only 18 and fungi had been a passing thing of youth. That she was now more interested in parasurgery, and stuck her tongue out at me. Until now she had been docile, kind — I didn't like to see my wife chewed up. I couldn't

help thinking Dr. Mannfried had given her something — dexamyl or the like. And I found myself getting sleepy too early in the evening — 8 or 9 — sleeping like the dead at 10 or 11. I wouldn't have put it past them to be slipping me a little chloral hydrate. Love will find a way. No one knows better than a doctor that the Oath of Hippocrates is as outdated as the general practitioner. Once I thought I heard her scream but couldn't rouse myself from my stupor; it was possible they had invaded my bedroom for added thrills.

I returned to sculpture, experimenting after the manner of Picasso, using bread as the basic material; malleable, sprayed with plastic, a variety of textures and colours was possible, whole wheat to white to rye and pumpernickel, the whole allowed to overrun with algae to give a patina of age. I was invited to display in the patio of the Los Angeles Country Art Museum, drawing much good comment among the works of Giacometti, Rueben Nakian and Peter Voulkos. My work was impervious to the weather and this being a modern era no one found fault with my using bread as the basis for a work of art. Tempera, after all, being egg.

And I still had to do my job. Gemini 1, 2, 3, 4, *etc.* Trickier and more complex every year. One of these bitches was going to cause me to blow a gasket.

Pallas showed up one Wednesday morning bleeding about the cheek. She now had enough of all Americans and was returning to Greece immediately via — so help me — the Far East where she hoped to gain some peace of mind through an examination of their religions. I was to give her passage. And, oddly, she now used Elva's nasty remark, exactly. If fungi is my jugular, Greece was hers. I called her a name and was immediately sorry; I believe in integration. That's Italian, she said, and stuck out her tongue. What a beauty, crying, bleeding, her clothes torn and her tongue sticking out. My last young girl. I had to give her her freedom, but not before talking to Dr. Mannfried. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, licking his lips. He was a big bastard, like lots of them are with the knife. They look like butchers but can thread a needle with their thumbs. "I hardly know your wife," he said, "but I'll say this for her — I admire your taste, she's delicious."

I wanted to hit the big son-of-a-bitch, but what would that prove. I needed my hands for my work as much as he needed his.

"Yes, isn't she," I said, and went to the market to buy all their second-day bread. I'd have to keep busy, now that I would be alone.

Oddly, Dr. Mannfried seemed drawn to me after Pallas left for Hong Kong. He enjoyed talking about her, the bastard; even mentioning my first wife made his mouth water, although he hadn't made a pass at her because that was before his son had graduated

from college and he said he'd taken a solemn oath in his youth not to screw up his life until his boy was 21. I'm not much of a talker, but I'm a good listener — and I listened as I patted sandwich loaf into patterns of desire. I kept sculpting women; it was a compulsion.

What happened next was magnificent, and almost cleared my mind. Man's first walk in space. (Actually the second, after the USSR.) As usual, I had been called to the Cape to head the decontamination and sterilisation crew, getting Gemini 4 ready for space. The planets must not be a dumping ground for human waste. This was drill — preparation for our coming flight to the moon. After Gemini 4 all my space flights would be *etc.* — all my systems were go. But I didn't know it then.

The microorganisms carried by a single astronaut — any man — total approximately 10^{12}, 10 followed by 12 zeros. I cleaned up our boys, using ethylene oxide gas on the capsule to spare the components. Everything shipshape and clean as a whistle. But when they opened the hatch in stellar space ... something was coming the other way.

I found spore. There was no doubt about it, and only one. It was impossible at that height — it couldn't be one of ours. It had been sucked into the capsule vacuum-cleaner in space, after the hatch had been re-secured. That space is filled with more than nothing — anti-matter matter and the like — this we know: but *spore.*

I took it to my laboratory — home — by jet toward an optimum environment; and perhaps selfishly told no one about it.

I had no idea what food it would take. I gave it a loaf of bread and stood back to wait. Was it alive?

It had withstood the all but absolute temperatures of space; it had withstood the devastating effects of radiation — it might prove a mutation of its original form on another planet.

I confess, I fell asleep watching the loaf of rye bread on its emulsion of fungi-free earth. I'd been up since the discovery — and sleep is a protective device against sustained excitement. Perhaps it hadn't been chloral hydrate. It was quiet in the laboratory, a single overhead light on the experiment. I had even cut off the Muzak the President feels will ease our progress. It must have been ten o'clock; it was dawn when I awoke.

My God, it was huge! I'd never seen anything like it. At first I thought it was a tree, the trunk was three feet through. It was six feet tall, of a perfect symmetry, a ruff under its chin and the most beautiful mushroom I had ever seen. A creamy off-white, its cap a brilliant orange flecked with chaste white dots. The bread was gone and it was feeding on earth and the wood surrounding it. I ran to my quarters off the laboratory, where I do my sculpture, returning to bank loaves of

bread around the trunk. It rejected them, having taken its full growth. Such texture! What *tournedos aux champignons* it would make! This mushroom would make me famous! But now I couldn't reveal my secret; we're supposed to tell NASA everything; to hell with NASA. This was one triumph I could enjoy privately. I didn't need the roll of drums and a wire from Stockholm. I touched its flesh. That it might eat me crossed my mind, but where work is concerned I am not passive. I squeezed it. It was warm, soft and giving, like a girl's trunk. I put my arms around it — what a baby! I kissed it and the odour was sweet and sophisticated as some mushrooms. Even here on earth. Now this one was on earth and it was mine. But would it spore? Go inky or blow away as so much of our dew-raised fungi spores to blow away sight unseen in some forgotten pasture? No. The second and even the third day found it standing firm but undulating slightly in the morning air. I had taken the mushroom across campus to my home, for the sake of privacy and experiment. It was surprisingly light, no heavier than a girl. But then the world's record yield of mushrooms per square foot is only 7.35 pounds.

Its flesh seemed alive, palpitant — I'm no pantheist, yet I've often felt that plants, trees, flowers, have a life we know nothing of. I left the window open to let it breathe. The curtains moved gently with the breeze and my mushroom would softly sway.

Where in hell had it come from? That there was some form of life on other planets, now we knew. I knew. Well, others would find out in time. Now the experiments could begin. Had to begin. I was a scientist, after all, and had to do it. I had to cut. I didn't know what to expect, so gingerly, gingerly, I approached it, knife in hand, waited, then slipped it in.

It seemed to sigh, but perhaps it was my imagination. It cut nicely. What lovely texture I Like a young girl's thighs. Soft and perfectly grained.

I took a leave of absence from the university; and as the days went by carved more deeply into Lulu. I had now given her a name, after the manner of weather bureaus with hurricanes. Lulu. It seemed a good name for a tanned girl, perhaps a fine mulatto, a girl from the islands, Polynesia — what skin! Luana. Goodbye, Lulu — you are Luana! Aloha — which also means Hello. I couldn't place her in the known world of mushrooms, but that didn't surprise me — and then I left off experimenting, removing my sculpturing tools from Building 28, bringing them home to really go to work. What a figure! It was no trouble at all, she almost carved herself, orange giving way to pale pink-and-gold making flowers in her hair. I swear it was as though she was *there,* although she never spoke — I hadn't gone that far — nor did I speak to her: there are limits. I didn't know whether to leave

clothes on her. Or not. But I was never one to go along with that misguided Pope painting diapers on Michelangelo's cupids. I carved her whole and I carved her nude. No abstraction — who wants the portrait of a loved one in abstraction? I'd rather have a photograph. Take my word for it, I'm a good sculptor — the Venus de Milo: that's my sort of thing. Only lighter, more slender, more docile. I knew Luana was docile — perhaps she was Japanese, a sweet Japanese girl lisping syllables I would never understand, little Miss Suke, and that was the day Dr. Mannfried walked in unannounced.

The dirty bastard just stood there, sucking in his breath and staring at Luana. He was stricken. I'd done better than I knew. But then, I was inspired. "My God," he said, "what is it?"

"Just a statue," I said.

"I'd swear it was alive."

"Don't stand too close."

"Why not?"

"She might bite you."

He had the grace to blush; I never thought I'd ever see a surgeon blush. He wanted to touch Luana, but I led him into the patio, rubbing mushroom off my hands. I even had her in my hair. I stopped wiping her off; somehow it seemed a sacrilege. Her flesh was only slightly moist, pleasantly taut, excellent for subtlety with the knife. Dr. Mannfried picked a piece from my hair and stupidly said, " ... it's springy."

"Yes," I said. "isn't it."

"What is it?"

"What's what?"

"What material are you using?"

"A new plastic"

"Oh."

But I could see he didn't believe me. And then I made the mistake of saying:

"I'd prefer you didn't tell anyone about this."

He smiled that rapacious smile; he had something on his mind. I knew I shouldn't have trusted the big bastard.

"You can trust me," said Dr. Mannfried.

He came every day to see Luana. And oddly enough, to my knowledge, he did keep his word — no one mentioned Luana or asked what I was doing on holiday.

When there was no breeze I would turn on the fans, two oscillating twelve inchers I had bought for the purpose, placing one on each side of her. I would play 'Sweet Leilani' on the hi-fi, 'Bali H'ai', and watch her move to the music — a lovely nymph from some lost planet, perhaps now gone from the universe, a billion years ago, for

spore is immortal. Almost. Raise the temperature of earth but a few degrees and she would take over the world. My beautiful dancing mushroom, Luana.

I kept her shored with cupcakes in case she wanted to eat; it was impossible to know at what moment she might die. I thought of covering her with moist cloth, but she seemed moist enough and I didn't want to run the risk of fungi forming, fungi on fungi, it would only seem humourous to someone who had never seen Luana. And yet something was missing and I knew what it was. Being shy, I just couldn't do it. But Dr. Mannfried could. Earthy bastard.

"She hasn't got that thing," said Dr. Mannfried. He'd been observing her closely for some minutes. He moved one of the fans and changed the record. We were both sharing her now, there was no way to shut him out, persistent swine.

"No, my friend," said Dr. Mannfried, "you are a great sculptor, but she hasn't got that thing."

I still hadn't allowed him to touch her.

"That's my department," said Dr. Mannfried.

Remembering Picasso and the goat, I felt an inadequacy that goes beyond belief. That full-blooded Spaniard could do it but not me. I had even considered draping her with a pareu, a little one, about the hips. Dr. Mannfried was right. I had to let him have his way.

"I've taken a lot of them out," he said, "but this is the first time I've ever put one in," and he was sweating, even with the fans on, his eyes beady.

"Now?" I asked.

"Now," he said.

"Can ... I watch?"

"No, it'll be better if you wait outside."

"You'll be careful ... "

"Please, I know my business."

"How long will it be, Doctor?"

"I'll let you know when it's over. There's nothing to worry about." And taking my smallest, sharpest knife, he started for Luana. His eyes never left her and his hand was snaking.

I must have walked the floor for 10 — 15 minutes, smoking cigarette after cigarette, which isn't like me — up and down outside that door — letting Dr. Mannfried do what I should have done. It was his sudden scream that sent me hurtling into the room of my beloved. Dr. Mannfried was hanging on her, torn by ecstasy, his teeth buried deep in her neck.

I'll never know how I got through the next few hours. I tried patching her throat with brown bread, but it wasn't the same. I didn't turn on the fans or play the music that night.

It was sometime after midnight when I received the call from my colleague Dr. Shih. He told me to come over to Dr. Mannfried's house at once, that this was an emergency. Oddly, I still believe in Hippocrates, and so I went, to be met at the door by a wide-eyed Dr. Shih with the contents of a stomach in his hands.

"Raymond, Raymond," he said, "Mannfried is dying ... "

"Is that so," I said.

A ripping yell filled the house, as if all the voices of the damned were being forced through the throat of one man. I ran to the bedroom — what had been Dr. Mannfried lay stretched on the mattress. One look at his face and I knew what was wrong. I had seen that look on the faces of a family of seven who had died in the 15th century — mummified in the catacombs of France — the look of unendurable pain persisting through the centuries. Only one thing could put that look on a man's face — a look he would carry to his grave under his cosmetics — poisoning by the Amanita.

Luana was a toadstool.

I was afraid of that.

Getting back from media (like phlogiston, ether, spirit messages, poetry, oil paints, or mushrooms) to The Media —

Would you believe that Gilbert Thomas was the highest-rated TV newscaster in all the Hawaiian Islands in 1959? True. Altogether he has had more than a quarter-century in The Media: newscasting, commentating, producing, packaging, directing and writing for radio and TV, from Buffalo to Saigon. He now sandwiches articles on the Far East (for Asia, Saturday Review, *etc.) and occasional short stories in between script-writing jobs.*

Of course the medium is *not the message: I mean, obviously, the message* is *not the medium. Q. E. D.*

There was *some basis for my wariness about the Pop Prof: between the beginning of his cult in 1951 and hitting the Big Time in 1964, he acquired one besetting, and audience-besotting, sin. Whether through carelessness or (miscalculation, it adds up to the too frequent subordination of* his *message by his own medium, words: the sacrifice of clarity to the hypnotic cadence of pop-talk, pun-fun, and the catch-phrase. For example:* 1) *He describes the 'participation involvement' of TV-viewing as 'cool' — the 'fragmented' detachment of the reader as 'hot'. (The reason: a course in Contemp. Eng. from uncool Jack Paar, who got told by a put-on kid that 'cool'* means *'hot' nowadays.)* 2) *From 'The Medium is the Message', the most-quoted chapter of the most-quoted Book of McLuhan,* Understanding Media:

The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or

concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception.

For 'artist', read 'craftsman' or 'technician': the pastry chef, cobbler, engineer, or copywriter has, of necessity, the same 'expert awareness' of the effects of his own medium on sense perception as the painter, oboist, or poet. Now replace that adventurous 'encounter' with pedantic old 'relate to': the awareness can be applied not only as consumer, but as creator.

3) *Maybe: 'Any medium is* also *a message'*?

Put them all together, they don't swing the same way, but they spell out an important message: that the serious artist, too, can do as for instance, the Adman must *do — design the message going* into *the medium to include and take advantage of the message* of *(in this case) The Media.*

W-a-v-e-r
Tuli Kupferberg

W-A-V-E-R, non-controversial radio

Broadcast an hour of silence.
But several thousand complaints were mailed to the station

Each containing a blank sheet of paper.
But since none had a stamp on them

They were sent to the dead-letter office.
Which came to blazing life

And burned in a noisy fire.
There were enough atoms left over from this fire

To start another station.
The station broadcast nothing but static.

Take a word: content. *Take it away — it's out. Take another:* hypnoprone. *It's mine and you can have it.*

The great Media audience has reason to worry about content. (You too can be hypnoprone. When you no longer 'hear' the commercials, and you start singing-along with any *lyric provided the beat is right, you better start* hoping *there's no content.) The latest thing is the sing-along (with Marsh McLuhan) school of criticism, which has compounded the ready-made artist/artisan and consumer/creator confusions, with a message/ sermon mixup. Add a dash of camp; up pops Susan Sontag, who — actually — worries that 'the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content' will 'violate art' or make it 'into an article of use'*

This Pop Preachment on null-content (anti-matter?) is described in the Report from Iron Mountain *(Dial, 1967):*

... Art would be reassigned the role it once played in a few primitive peace-oriented social systems. This was the function of pure decoration, entertainment, or play, entirely free of the burden of expressing the sociomoral values and conflicts of a war-oriented society. It is interesting

that the groundwork for such a value-free aesthetic is already being laid today, in growing experimentation in art without conflict. A cult has developed around a new kind of cultural determinism, which proposes that the technological form of a cultural expression determines its values rather than does its ostensibly meaningful content. Its clear implication is that there is no 'good' or 'bad' art, only that which is appropriate to its (technological) times and that which is not.

During the Jurassic
John Updike

Waiting for the first guests, the iguanodon gazed along the path and beyond, toward the monotonous cycad forests and the low volcanic hills. The landscape was everywhere interpenetrated by the sea, a kind of metallic blue rottenness that daily breathed in and out. Behind him, his wife was assembling the hors d'oeuvres. As he watched her, something unintended, something grossly solemn, in his expression made her laugh, displaying the leaf-shaped teeth lining her cheeks. Like him, she was an ornithischian, but much smaller — a compsognathus. He wondered, watching her race bipedally back and forth among the scraps of food (dragonflies wrapped in ferns, cephalopods on toast), how he had ever found her beautiful. His eyes hungered for size: he experienced a rage for sheer blind size.

The stegosauri, of course, were the first to appear. Among their many stupid friends these were the most stupid, and the most punctual. Their front legs bent outward and their filmy-eyed faces almost grazed the ground: the upward sweep of their backs was gigantic, and the double rows of giant bone plates along the spine clicked together in the sway of their cumbersome gait. With hardly a greeting, they dragged their tails, quadruply spiked, across the threshold and manoeuvred themselves toward the bar, which was tended by a minute and shapeless mammal hired for the evening.

Next came the allosaurus, a carnivorous bachelor whose dangerous aura and needled grin excited the female herbivores; then Rhamphorhynchus, a pterosaur whose much admired 'flight' was in reality a clumsy brittle glide ending in an embarrassed bump and trot. The iguanodon despised these pterosaurs' pretensions, thought grotesque the precarious elongation of the single finger from which their levitating membranes were stretched, and privately believed that the eccentric archaeopteryx, though sneered at as unstable, had more of a future. The hypsilophoden, with her graceful hands and branch-gripping feet, arrived with the timeless crocodile — an incongruous pair, but both, were recently divorced. Still the iguanodon gazed down the path.

Behind him, the conversation gnashed on a thousand things — houses, mortgages, lawns, fertilisers, erosion, boats, winds, annuities, capital gains, recipes, education, the day's tennis, last night's party. Each party was consumed by discussion of the previous one. Their lives were subject to constant cross-check. When did you leave? When

did *you* leave? We'd been out every night this week. We had an amphibious baby sitter who had to be back in the water by one. Gregor had to meet a client in town, and now they've reduced the Saturday schedule, it means the 7:43 or nothing. Trains? I thought they were totally extinct. Not at all. They're coming back, it's just a matter of time until the government ... In the long range of evolution, they are still the most efficient ... Taking into account the heat-loss/weight ratio and assuming there's no more glaciation ... Did you know — I think this is fascinating — did you know that in the financing of those great ornate stations of the eighties and nineties, those real monsters, there was no provision for amortisation? They weren't amortised at all, they were financed on the basis of eternity! The railroad was conceived of as the end of Progress! *I* think — though not an expert — that the pivot word in this overall industrio-socio-what-have-you-oh nexus or syndrome or whatever is *overextended*. Any competitorless object *bloats*. Personally I miss the trolley cars. Now don't tell me I'm the only creature in the room old enough to remember the trolley cars!

The iguanodon's high pulpy heart jerked and seemed to split; the brontosaurus was coming up the path.

Her husband, the diplodocus, was with her. They moved together, rhythmic twins, buoyed by the hollow assurance of the huge. She paused to tear with her lips a clump of leaf from an overhanging paleocycas. From her deliberate grace the iguanodon received the impression that she knew he was watching her. Indeed, she had long guessed his love, as had her husband. The two saurischians entered his party with the languid confidence of the specially cherished. In the teeth of the iguanodon's ironic stance, her bulk, her gorgeous size, enraptured him, swelled to fill the massive ache he carried when she was not there. She rolled outward across his senses — the dawn-pale underparts, the reticulate skin, the vast bluish muscles whose management required a second brain at the base of her spine.

Her husband, though even longer, was more slenderly built, and perhaps weighed less than twenty-five tons. His very manner was attenuated and tabescent. He had recently abandoned an orthodox business career to enter the Episcopalian seminary. This regression — as the iguanodon felt it — seemed to make his wife more prominent, less supported, more accessible.

How splendid she was! For all the lavish solidity of her hips and legs, the modelling of her little flat diapsid skull was delicate. Her facial essence seemed to narrow, along the diagrammatic points of her auricles and eyes and nostrils, toward a single point, located in the air, of impermutable refinement and calm. This irreducible point was, he realised, in some sense her mind: the focus of the minimal interest she

brought to play upon the inchoate and edible green world flowing all about her, buoying her, bathing her. The iguanodon felt himself as an upright speckled stain in this world. He felt himself, under her distant dim smile, impossibly ugly: his mouth a sardonic chasm, his throat a pulsing curtain of scaly folds, his body a blotched bulb. His feet were heavy and horny and three-toed and his thumbs — strange adaptation! — were erect rigidities of pointed bone. Wounded by her presence, he savagely turned on her husband.

"*Comment va le bon Dieu*?"

"Ah?" The diplodocus was maddeningly good-humoured. Minutes elapsed as stimuli and reactions travelled back and forth across his length.

The iguanodon insisted. "How are things in the supernatural?"

"The supernatural? I don't think that category exists in the new theology."

"*N'est-ce pas?* What *does* exist in the new theology?"

"Love. Immanence as opposed to transcendence. Works as opposed to faith."

"Work? I had thought you had quit work."

"That's an unkind way of putting it. I prefer to think that I've changed employers."

The iguanodon felt in the other's politeness a detestable aristocracy, the unappealable oppression of superior size. He said, gnashing, "The Void pays wages?"

"Ah?"

"You mean there's a living in nonsense? I said nonsense. Dead, fetid nonsense."

"Call it that if it makes it easier for you. Myself, I'm not a fast learner. Intellectual humility came rather natural to me. In the seminary, for the first time in my life, I feel on the verge of finding myself."

"Yourself? That little thing? *Cette petite chose*? That's all you're looking for? Have you tried pain? Myself, I have found pain to be a great illuminator. *Permettez-moi*." The iguanodon essayed to bite the veined base of the serpentine throat lazily upheld before him; but his teeth were too specialised and could not tear flesh. He abraded his lips and tasted his own salt blood. Disoriented, crazed, he thrust one thumb deep into a yielding gray flank that hove through the smoke and chatter of the party like a dull wave. But the nerves of his victim lagged in reporting the pain, and by the time the distant head of the diplodocus was notified, the wound would have healed.

The drinks were flowing freely. The mammal crept up to him and murmured that the dry vermouth was running out.

The iguanodon told him to use the sweet. Behind the sofa the

stegosauri were Indian-wrestling; each time one went over, his spinal plates raked the recently papered wall. The hypsilophoden, tipsy, perched on a bannister; the allosaurus darted forward suddenly and ceremoniously nibbled her tail. On the far side of the room, by the great slack-stringed harp, the compsognathus and the brontosaurus were talking. He was drawn to them: amazed that his wife would presume to delay the much larger creature; to insert herself, with her scrabbling nervous motions and chattering leaf-shaped teeth, into the crevices of that queenly presence. As he drew closer to them, music began. His wife said to him, "The salad is running out." He murmured to the brontosaurus, *"Chère madame, voulez-vous danser avec moi?"*

Her dancing was awkward, but even in this awkwardness, this ponderous stiffness, he felt the charm of her abundance. "I've been talking to your husband about religion," he told her, as they settled into the steps they could do.

"I've given up," she said. "It's such a deprivation for me and the children."

"He says he's looking for himself."

"It's so selfish," she said. "The children are teased at school."

"Come live with me."

"Can you support me?"

"No, but I would gladly sink under you."

"You're sweet."

"*"Je t'aime.*"

"Don't. Not here."

"Somewhere, then?"

"No. Nowhere. Never." With what delightful precision did her miniature mouth encompass these infinitesimal concepts!

"But I," he said, "but I lo — "

"Stop it. You embarrass me. Deliberately."

"You know what I wish? I wish all these beasts would disappear. What do we see in each other? Why do we keep getting together?"

She shrugged. "If they disappear, we will too."

"I'm not so sure. There's something about us that would survive. It's not in you and not in me but between us, where we almost meet. Some vibration, some enduring cosmic factor. Don't you feel it?"

"Let's stop. It's too painful."

"Stop dancing?"

"Stop being."

"That's a beautiful idea. *Une belle idée*. I will if you will."

"In time," she said;, and her fine little face precisely fitted this laconic promise; and as the summer night yielded warmth to the multiplying stars, he felt his blood sympathetically cool, and grow thunderously, fruitfully slow.

Few books today are forgivable. Black on the canvas, silence on the screen, an empty white sheet of paper are perhaps feasible. There is little conjunction of truth and social 'reality'. Around us are 'pseudo events', to which we adjust with a false consciousness adapted to see these events as true and real, and even as beautiful. In the society of men the truth resides now less in what things are than in what they are not ...

What is to be done? We who are still half alive, living in the often fibrillating heartland of a senescent capitalism — can we do more than sing our sad and bitter songs of disillusion and defeat?

The requirement of the present, the failure of the past, is the same: to provide a thoroughly self-conscious and self-critical human account of man.

(R. D. Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise)

The Fall of Frenchy Steiner
Hilary Bailey

1954 was not a year of progress. A week before Christmas I walked into the bar of the Merrie Englande in Leicester Square, my guitar in its case, my hat in my hand. Two constables were sitting on wooden stools at the counter. Their helmets turned together as I walked in. The place was badly lit by candles, hiding the run-down look but not the run-down smell of homebrew and damp rot.

"Who's he?" said one of the PCs as I moved past.

"I work here," I said. Tired old dialogue for tired old people.

He grunted and sipped his drink. I didn't look at the barman. I didn't look at the cops. I just went into the room behind the bar and took off my coat. I went to the wash-basin, turned the taps. Nothing happened. I got my guitar out of its case, tested it, tuned it and went back into the bar with it.

"Water's off again," said Jon, the barman. He was a flimsy wisp in black with a thin white face. "Nothing's working today ... "

"Well, we've still got an efficient police force," I said. The cops turned to look at me again. I didn't care. I felt I could afford a little relaxation. One of them chewed the strap of his helmet and frowned. The other smiled.

"You work here do you, sir? How much does the boss pay you?" He continued to smile, speaking softly and politely. I sneered.

"Him?" I pointed with my thumb up to where the boss lived. "He wouldn't, even if it was legal." Then I began to worry. I'm like that — moody. "What are you doing here, anyway, officer?"

"Making enquiries, sir," said the frowning one.

"About a customer," said Jon. He leant back against an empty shelf, his arms folded.

"That's right," said the smiling one.

"Who?"

The cops' eyes shifted.

"Frenchy," said Jon.

"So Frenchy's in trouble. It couldn't be something she's done. Someone she knows?"

The cops turned back to the bar. The frowning one said: "Two more. Does he know her?"

"As much as I do," said Jon, pouring out the potheen. The white, cloudy stuff filled the tumblers to the brim. Jon must be worried to pour such heavy ones for nothing.

I got up on to the platform where I sang, flicking the mike which I knew would be dead as it had been since the middle of the war. I leaned my guitar against the driest part of the wall and struck a match. I lit the two candles in their wall-holders.

They didn't exactly fill the corner with a blaze of light, they smoked and guttered and stank and cast shadows. I wondered briefly who had supplied the fat. They weren't much good as heating either. It was almost as cold inside as out. I dusted off my stool and sat down, picked up my guitar and struck a few chords. I hardly realised I was playing *Frenchy's Blues*. It was one of those corny numbers that come easy to the fingers without you having to think about them.

Frenchy wasn't French, she was a kraut and who liked krauts? I liked Frenchy, along with all the customers who came to hear her sing to my accompaniment. Frenchy didn't work at the Merrie Englande, she just enjoyed singing. She didn't keep boyfriends long or often, she preferred to sing, she said.

Frenchy's Blues only appealed to the least sensitive members of our cordial clientele. I didn't care for it. I'd tried to do something good for her, but as with most things I tried to do well, it hadn't come off. I changed the tune. I was used to changing my tune. I played *Summertime* and then I played *Stormy Weather*.

The cops sipped the drinks and waited. Jon leant against the shelves, his narrow, black-clad body almost invisible in the shadow, only his thin face showing. We didn't look at one another. We were both scared — not only for Frenchy, but for ourselves. The cops had a habit of subpoenaing witnesses and forgetting to release them after the trial — particularly if they were healthy men who weren't already working in industry or the police force. Though I didn't have to fear this possibility as much as most, I was still worried.

During the evening I heard the dull sound of far-away bomb explosions, the drone of planes. That would be the English Luftwaffe doing exercises over the still-inhabited suburbs.

Customers came and most of them went after a drink and a squint at the constables.

Normally Frenchy came in between eight and nine, when she came. She didn't come. As we closed up around midnight, the cops got off their stools. One unbuttoned his tunic pocket and took out a notebook and pencil. He wrote on the pad, tore off the sheet and left it on the bar.

"If she turns up, get in touch," he said. "Merry Christmas, sir," he nodded to me. They left.

I looked at the piece of paper. It was cheap, blotting-paper stuff and one corner was already soaked up spilled potheen. In large capitals, the PC had printed: "Contact Det. Insp. Braun, N. Scot. Yd,

Ph. WHI 1212, Ext. 615."

"Braun?" I smiled and looked up at Jon. "Brown?"

"What's in a name?" he said.

"At least it's CID. What do you think it's about, Jon?"

"You never can tell these days," said Jon. "Good night, Lowry."

"Night." I went into the room behind the bar, packed my guitar and put on my coat. Jon came in to get his street clothes.

"What do they want her for?" I said. "It's not political stuff, anyway. The Special Branch isn't interested, it seems. What — ?"

"Who knows?" said Jon brusquely. "Goodnight — "

"Night," I said. I buttoned up my coat, pulled my gloves on and picked up the guitar case. I didn't wait for Jon since he evidently wasn't seeking the company and comfort of an old pal. The cops seemed to have worried him. I wondered what he was organising on the side. I decided to be less matey in future. For some time my motto had been simple — keep your nose clean.

I left the bar and entered the darkness of the square. It was empty. The iron railings and trees had gone during the war. Even the public lavatories were officially closed, though sometimes people slept in them. The tall buildings were stark against the night sky. I turned to my right and walked towards Piccadilly Circus, past the sagging hoardings that had been erected around bomb craters, treading on loose paving stones that rocked beneath my feet. Piccadilly Circus was as bare and empty as anywhere else. The steps were still in the centre, but the statue of Eros wasn't there any more. Eros had flown from London towards the end of the war. I wish I'd had the same sense.

I crossed the circus and walked down Piccadilly itself, the wasteland of St. James' Park on one side, the tall buildings, or hoardings where they had been, on the other. I walked in the middle of the road, as was the custom. The occasional car was less of a risk than the frequent cosh-merchant. My hotel was in Piccadilly, just before you got to Park Lane.

I heard a helicopter fly over as I reached the building and unlocked the door. I closed the door behind me, standing in a wide, cold foyer unlighted and silent. Outside the sound of the helicopter died and was replaced by the roar of about a dozen motorbikes heading in the general direction of Buckingham Palace where Field Marshal Wilmot had his court. Wilmot wasn't the most popular man in Britain, but his efficiency was much admired in certain quarters. I crossed the foyer to the broad staircase. It was marble, but uncarpeted. The bannister rocked beneath my hand as I climbed the stairs.

A man passed me on my way up. He was an old man. He wore a red dressing gown and carried a chamber pot as far away from him as

his shaking hand could stand.

"Good morning, Mr. Pevensey," I said.

"Good morning, Mr. Lowry," he replied, embarrassed. He coughed, started to speak, coughed again. As I began on the third flight, I heard him wheeze something about the water being off again. The water was off most of the time. It was only news when it came on. The gas came on three times a day for half-an-hour — if you were lucky. The electricity was supposed to run all day if people used the suggested ration, but nobody did, so power failures were frequent.

I had an oil stove, but no oil. Oil was expensive and could be got only on the black market. Using the black market meant risking being shot, so I did without oil. I had a place I used as a kitchen, too. There was a bathroom along the corridor. One of the rooms I used had a balcony overlooking the street with a nice view of the weed-tangled park. I didn't pay rent for these rooms. My brother paid it under the impression that I had no money. Vagrancy was a serious crime, though prevalent, and my brother didn't want me to be arrested because it caused him trouble to get me out of jail or one of the transit camps in Hyde Park.

I unlocked my door, tried the light switch, got no joy. I struck a match and lit four candles stuck in a candelabra on the heavy mantelpiece. I glanced in the mirror and didn't like the dull-eyed face I saw there. I was reckless. My next candle allowance was a month off but I'd always liked living dangerously. In a small way.

I put on my tattered tweed overcoat, Burberry's 1938, lay down on the dirty bed and put my hands behind my head. I brooded.

I wasn't tired, but I didn't feel very well. How could I, on my rations?

I went back to thinking about Frenchy's trouble. It was better than thinking about trouble in general. She must be involved in something, although she never looked as if she had the energy to take off her slouch hat, let alone get mixed up in anything illegal. Still, since the krauts had taken over in 1946 it wasn't hard to do something illegal. As we used to say, if it wasn't forbidden, it was compulsory. Even strays and vagabonds like me were straying under license — in my case procured by brother Gottfried, ex-Godfrey, now Deputy Minister of Public Security. How he'd made it baffled me, with our background. Because obviously the first people the krauts had cleared out when they came to liberate us was the revolutionary element. And in England, of course, that wasn't the tattered, hungry mob rising in fury after centuries of oppression. It was the well-heeled, well-meaning law-civil-service-church-and-medicine brigade who came out of their warm houses to stir it all up.

Anyway, thinking about Godfrey always made my flesh creep, so I

pulled my mind back to Frenchy. She was a tall, skinny rake of a girl, a worn out, battered old twenty in a dirty white mac and a shapeless pull-down hat with the smell of a Cagney gangster film about it. I never noticed what was under the mac — she never took it off. Once or twice she'd gone mad and undone it. I had the impression that underneath she was wearing a dirty black mac. No stockings, muddy legs, shoes worn down to stubs, not exactly Ginger Rogers on the town with Fred Astaire. Still, the customers liked her singing, particularly her deadpan rendering of *Deutschland Über Alles,* slow, husky and meaningful, with her white face staring out over the people at the bar. A kraut by nationality, but not by nature, that was Frenchy.

I yawned. Not much to do but go to sleep and try for that erotic dream where I was sinking my fork into a plate of steak and kidney pudding. Or perhaps, if I couldn't get to sleep, I'd try a nice stroll round the crater where St. Paul's had been — my favourite way of turning my usual depression into a really fruity attack of melancholia.

Then there was a knock.

I went rigid.

Late night callers were usually cops. In a flash I saw my face with blood streaming from the mouth and a lot of black bruises. Then the knock came again. I relaxed. Cops never knocked twice — just a formal rap and then in and all over you.

The door opened and Frenchy stepped in. She closed the door behind her.

I was off the bed in a hurry.

I shook my head. "Sorry, Frenchy. It's no go."

She didn't move. She stared at me out of her dark blue eyes. The shadows underneath looked as though someone had put inky thumbs under them.

"Look, Frenchy," I said. "I've told you there's nothing doing." She ought to have gone before. It was the code. If someone wanted by the cops asked for help you had the right to tell them to go. No one thought any the worse of you. If you were a breadwinner it was expected.

She went on standing there. I took her by the shoulders, about faced her, wrenched the door open with one hand and ran her out on to the landing.

She turned to look at me. "I only came to borrow a fag," she said sadly, like a kid wrongfully accused of drawing on the wallpaper.

The code said I had to warn her, so I shoved her back into my room again.

She sat on my rumpled bed in the guttering candlelight with her beautiful, mud-streaked legs dangling over the side. I passed her a cigarette and lit it.

"There were two cops in the Merrie asking about you," I said. "CID!"

"Oh," she said blankly. "I wonder why? I haven't done anything."

"Passing on coupons, trying to buy things with money, leaving London without a pass — " I suggested. Oh, how I wanted to get her off the premises.

"No. I haven't done anything. Anyhow, they must know I've got a full passport."

I gaped at her. I knew she was a kraut — but why should she have a full passport? Owning one of those was like being invisible — people ignored what you did. You could take what you wanted from who you wanted. You could, if you felt like it, turn a dying old lady out of a hospital wagon so you could have a joy-ride, pinch food — anything. A sensible man who saw a full passport holder coming towards him turned round and ran like hell in the other direction. He could shoot you and never be called to account. But how Frenchy had come by one beat me.

"You're not in the government," I said. "How is it you've got an FP?"

"My father's Willi Steiner."

I looked at her horrible hat, her draggled blonde hair, her filthy mac and scuffed shoes. My mouth tightened.

"You don't say?"

"My father's the Mayor of Berlin," she said flatly. "There are eight of us and mother's dead so no one cares much. But of course we've all got full passports."

"Well, what the hell are you shambling around starving in London for?"

"I don't know."

Suspicious, I said: "Let's have a look at it, then."

She opened her raincoat and reached down into whatever it was she had on underneath. She produced the passport. I knew what they looked like because brother Godfrey was a proud owner. They were unforgettable. Frenchy had one.

I sat down on the floor, feeling expansive. If Frenchy had an FP I was safer than I'd ever been. An FP reflected its warm light over everybody near it. I reached under the mattress and pulled out a packet of Woodies. There were two left.

Frenchy grinned, accepting the fag. "I ought to flash it about more often."

We smoked gratefully. The allowance was ten a month. As stated, the penalty for buying on the black market, presuming you could get hold of some money, was shooting. For the seller it was something worse. No one knew what, but they hung the bodies up from time to

time and you got some idea of the end result.

"About this police business," I said.

"You don't mind if I kip here tonight," she said. "I'm beat."

"I don't mind," I said. "Want to hop in now? We can talk in bed."

She took off the mac, kicked away her shoes and hopped in.

I took off my trousers, shoes and socks, pulled down my sweater and blew out the candles. I got into bed. There was nothing more to it than that. Those days you either did or you didn't. Most didn't. What with the long hours, short rations and general struggle to keep half clean and slightly below par, few people had the will for sex. Also sex meant kids and the kids mostly died, so that took all the joy out of it. Also I've got the impression us English don't breed in captivity. The Welsh and Irish did, but then they've been doing it for hundreds of years.

The Highlanders didn't produce either. Increasing the population was something people like Godfrey worried about in the odd moments when they weren't eliminating it, but a declining birthrate is something you can't legislate about. What with the slave labour in the factories, cops round every corner, the jolly lads of the British Wehrmacht in every street, and being paid out in food and clothing coupons so you wouldn't do anything rash with the cash, like buying a razor blade and cutting your throat, you couldn't blame people for losing interest in propagating themselves. There'd been a resistance movement up until three or four years before, but they'd made a mistake and taken to the classic methods — blowing up bridges, the few operating railway lines and what factories had started up. It wasn't only the reprisals — on the current scale it was 20 men for every German killed, or 10 schoolkids or 5 women — but when people found out they were blowing up boot factories and stopping food trains, a loyal population, as the krauts put it, stamped out the anti-social Judaeo-Bolshevik element in their midst.

The birthrate might have gone up if they'd raised the rations after that, but that might cause a population explosion in more ways than one.

Anyhow, it was warmer in there with Frenchy beside me.

"Would you mind," I said, "removing your hat?"

I couldn't see her, but I could tell she was smiling. She reached up and pulled the old hat off and threw it on the floor.

"What about these cops, then?" I asked.

"Oh — I really don't know. Honestly, I haven't done anything. I don't even know anybody who's doing anything."

"Could they be after your full passport?"

"No. They never withdraw them. If they did the passports wouldn't mean anything. People wouldn't know if they were deferring

to a man with a withdrawn passport. If you do something like spying for Russia, they just eliminate *you*. That gets rid of your FP automatically."

"Maybe that's why they're after you ... ?"

"No. They don't involve the police. It's just a quick bullet."

I couldn't help feeling awed that Frenchy, who'd shared my last crusts, knew all this about the inner workings of the regime. I checked the thought instantly. Once you started being interested in them, or hating them or being emotionally involved with them in any way at all — they'd got you. It was something I'd sworn never to forget — only indifference was safe, indifference was the only weapon which kept you free, for what your freedom was worth. They say you get hardened to anything. Well, I'd had nearly ten years of it — disgusting, obscene cruelty carried out by stupid men who, from top to bottom, thought they were masters of the Earth — and I wasn't hardened. That was why I cultivated indifference. And the Leader — Our Führer — was no mad genius either. Mad and stupid. That was even worse. I couldn't understand, then, how he'd managed to do what he'd done. Not then.

"I don't know what it can be," Frenchy was saying, "but I'll know tomorrow when I wake up."

"Why?"

"I'm like that," she said roughly.

"Are you?" I was interested. "Like — what?"

She buried her face in my shoulder. "Don't talk about it, Lowry," she said, coming as near to an appeal as a hard case like Frenchy could.

"OK," I said. You soon learnt to steer away from the wrong topic. The way things, and people, were then.

So we went to sleep. When I woke, Frenchy was lying awake, staring up at the ceiling with a blank expression on her face. I wouldn't have cared if she'd turned into a marmalade cat overnight. I felt hot and itchy after listening to her moans and mutters all night and I could feel a migraine coming on.

The moment I'd acknowledged the idea of a migraine, my gorge rose, I got up and stumbled along the peeling passageway. Once inside the lavatory I knew I shouldn't have gone there. I was going to vomit in the bowl. The water was off. It was too late. I vomited, vomited and vomited. At least this one time the water came on at the right moment and the lavatory flushed.

I dragged myself back. I couldn't see and the pain was terrible.

"Come back to bed," Frenchy said.

"I can't," I said. I couldn't do anything.

"Come on."

I sat on the edge of the bed and lowered myself down. Go away, Frenchy, I said to myself, go away.

But her hands were on that spot, just above my left temple where the pain came from. She crooned and rubbed and to the sound of her crooning I fell asleep.

I woke about a quarter of an hour later and the pain had gone. Frenchy, mac, hat and shoes on, was sitting in my old arm chair, with the begrimed upholstery and shedding springs.

"Thanks, Frenchy," I mumbled. "You're a healer."

"Yeah," she said discouragingly.

"Do you often?"

"Not now," she said. "I used to. I just thought I'd like to help."

"Well,thanks," I said. "Stick around."

"Oh, I'm off now."

"OK. See you tonight, perhaps."

"No. I'm getting out of London. Coming with me?"

"Where. What for?"

"I don't know. I know the cops want me but I don't know why. I just know if I keep away from them for a month or two they won't want me any more."

"What the bloody hell are you talking about?"

"I said I'd know what it was about when I awoke. Well, I don't — not really. But I do know the cops want me to do something, or tell them something. And I know there's more to it than just the police. And I know that if I disappear for some time I won't be useful any more. So I'm going on the run."

"I suppose you'll be all right with your FP. No problem. But why don't you co-operate."

"I don't want to," she said.

"Why run? With your FP they can't touch you."

"They can. I'm sure they can."

I gave her a long look. I'd always known Frenchy was odd, by the old standards. But as things were now it was saner to be odd. Still, all this cryptic hide-and-seek, all this prescient stuff, made me wonder.

She stared back. "I'm not cracked. I know what I'm doing. I've got to keep away from the cops for a month or two because I don't want to co-operate. Then it will be OK."

"Do you mean you'll be OK?"

"Don't know. Either that or it'll be too late to do what they want. Are you coming?"

"I might as well," I said. When it came down to it, what had I got to lose? And Frenchy had an FP. We'd be millionaires. Or would we?

"How many FPs in Britain?" I asked.

"About two hundred."

"You can't use it then. If you go on the run using an FP you'd — we'd never go unnoticed. We'll stick out like a searchlight on a moor. And no one will cover for us. Why should they help an FP holder with the cops after her?"

Frenchy frowned. "I'd better stock up here then. Then we can leave London and throw them off the scent."

I nodded and got up and into the rest of my gear. "I'll nip out and spend a few clothing coupons on decent clothes for you. You won't be so memorable then. They'll just think you're some high-up civil servant. Then I'll tell you who to go to. The cops will check with the dodgy suppliers last. They won't expect FP holders to use Sid's Food-mart when they could go to Fortnums. Then I'll give you a list of what to get."

"Thanks, boss," she said. "So I was born yesterday."

"If I'm coming with you I don't want any slip-ups. If we're caught you'll risk an unpleasant little telling-off. And I'll be in a camp before you can say Abie Goldberg."

"No," she said bewilderedly. "I don't think so."

I groaned. "Frenchy, love. I don't know whether you're cracked, or Cassandra's second cousin. But if you can't be specific, let's play it sensible. OK?"

"Mm," she said.

I hurried off to spend my clothing coupons at Arthur's.

It was a soft day, drizzling a bit. I walked through the park. It was like a wood, now. The grass was deep and growing across the paths. Bushes and saplings had sprung up. Someone had built a small compound out of barbed wire on the grass just below the Atheneum. A couple of grubby white goats grazed inside. They must belong to the cops. With rations at two loaves a week people would eat them raw if they could get at them. Look what had happened to the vicar of All Saints, Margaret Street. He shouldn't have been so High Church — all that talk about the body and blood of Christ had set the congregation thinking along unorthodox lines.

I walked on in the drizzle. No one around. Nice fresh day. Nice to get out of London.

"Any food coupons?" said a voice in my ear.

I turned sharply. It was a young woman, so thin her shoulder blades and cheek bones seemed pointed. In her arms was a small baby. Its face was blue. Its violet-shadowed eyes were closed. It was dressed in a tattered blue jumper.

I shrugged. "Sorry, love. I've got a shilling — any use?"

"They'd ask me where I'd got it from. What's the good?" she whispered, never taking her eyes off the child's face.

"What's wrong with the kid?"

"They've cut off the dried milk. Unless you can feed them yourself they starve — I'm hungry."

I took out my diary. "Here's the address of a woman called Jessie Wright. Her baby's just died of diphtheria. She may take the kid on for you."

"Diphtheria?" she said.

"Look, love, your kid's half-dead anyway. It's worth trying."

"Thanks," she said. Tears started to run down her face. She took the piece of paper and walked off.

"Hey ho," said I, walking on.

I crossed the Mall and got the usual suspicious stares from the mixed assortment of soldiery that half-filled it. The uniforms were all the same. You couldn't tell the noble Tommy from the fiendish Hun. I looked to my right and saw Buckingham Palace. From the mast flew a huge flag, a Union Jack with a bloody great swastika superimposed on it. I'd never got rid of my loathing for that symbol, conceived as part of their perverted, crazy mysticism. Field Marshal Wilmot had been an officer in the Brigade of St. George — British fascists who had fought with Hitler almost from the start. A shrewd character that Wilmot. He had a little moustache that was identical with the Leader's — but as he was prematurely bald, hadn't been able to cultivate the lock of hair to go with it. He was fat and bloated with drink and probably drugs. He depended entirely on the Leader. If he hadn't been there it might have been a different story.

I walked down Buckingham Gate and turned right into Victoria Street. The Army and Navy Stores had become exactly what it said — only the military elite could shop there.

Arthur was in business in the former foreign exchange kiosk at Victoria Station. I bunged over the coupons. Sunlight streamed through the shattered canopy of the station. There had been some street fighting around here but it hadn't lasted long.

"I want a lady's coat, hat and shoes. Are these enough?"

Arthur was small and shrewd. He only had one arm. He put the coupons under his scanner. "They're not fakes." I said impatiently, "Are they enough?"

"Just about, mate — as it's you," he said. He was a thin-faced cockney from the City. His kind had survived plagues, sweatshops and the depression. He'd survive this, too. I happened to know he'd been one of Mosely's fascists before the War — in fact he'd kicked a thin-skulled Jew in the head in Dalston in 1938, thus saving him from the gas-chambers in 1948. Funny how things work out.

But somehow since the virile lads of the Wehrmacht had marched in he seemed to have cooled off the old blood-brotherhood of the

Aryans, so I never held it against him. Anyway, being about five foot two and weasely with it, he was no snip for the selective breeding camps.

"What size d'you want?" he asked.

"Oh, God. I don't know."

"The lady should have come herself." He looked suspicious.

"Coppers tore her clothes off," I said. That satisfied him. A cop passed across the station at a distance. Arthur's eyes flicked, then came back to me.

"Funny the way they left them in their helmets and so on," he said. "Seems wrong, dunnit?"

"They wanted you to think they were the same blokes who used to tell you the time and find old Rover for you when he got lost."

"Aren't they?" Arthur said sardonically. "You should have lived round where I lived mate. Still, this won't buy baby a new pair of boots. What's the lady look like?"

"About five nine or ten. Big feet:"

"Coo — no wonder the coppers fancied her," he jeered jealously. "You must feel all warm and safe with her. Thin or fat?"

"Come off it Arthur. Who's fat?"

"Girls who know cops."

"This one didn't until last night."

"Nothing dodgy is it?" His eyes started looking suspicious again. Trading licenses were hard to come by these days. I thought of telling him about Frenchy's full passport, but dismissed the idea. It would sound like a fantastic, dirty great lie. "She's OK. She just wants some clothes that's all."

"If she got her clothes torn off why don't she want a dress? That's more important to a lady than a hat — a lady what is a lady that is."

"Give me the coupons, Arthur." I stretched out my hand. "You're not the only clothes trader around. I came here to buy some gear, not tell you my love life."

"OK, Lowry. One coat, one hat, one pair of shoes, size 7 — and God help you if her feet's size 5." Arthur produced the things with a wonderful turn of speed. "And that'll be a quid on top."

I'd expected this. I handed him the pound. As I put the goods in a paper bag I said, "I took the number of that quid, mate. If the cops call on me about this deal I'll be able to tell them you're taking cash off the customers. They may not nick you, of course — but they may soak you hard."

He called me a bastard and added some more specific details, then said, "No hard feelings, Lowry. But I thought all along this was a dodgy deal."

"You mind your business chum, I'll mind mine," I said. "So long."

"So long," he said. I headed back towards the park.

Frenchy was asleep when I got back. She looked fragile, practically TB. I woke her up and handed her the gear. She put it on.

"Frenchy, love," I said sadly. "I've got to break it to you — you must have a wash. And comb your hair. And haven't you got a lipstick?"

She sulked but I fetched some water. By some accident Pevensey had missed what was left in the taps. She washed, combed her hair with my comb and we made up her lips with a Swan Vesta.

I stood back. Black coat, a bit short with a fur collar, white beret and black high heeled shoes.

"Honestly, French, you look like Marlene Dietrich," I said partly to give her the morale to carry off the FP-ing, partly because it was almost true. It was a pity she looked so undernourished, but perhaps they'd think it was natural. "Get yourself some makeup while you're at it."

"Here," she said in alarm, "I don't know what to do."

"You mean you've never *used* that passport," I said.

"You wouldn't if you were me," she replied. For her that was obviously the question you never asked, like "where were you in '45" or "what happened to cousin Fred." Her face was dark.

I passed it off. "You're cracked. Never mind. Just march into the place. Look confident. Tell them what you want. They'll cotton on immediately. You probably won't even need to show it to them. Scoop the stuff up and go. Don't forget they're scared of you."

"OK."

"Here's the list of what we want and where to get it."

"Yeah," she glanced over the list. "Brandy, eh?"

I grinned. "Christmas, after all. You never drink, though."

"No. It does something bad to me."

"Uh huh. Use a slight German accent. That'll convince them."

She left and I went and lay down. I felt tired after all that.

And, lo, another knock at my door, thinking it was Pevensey wanting me to get him some more quack medicine, I shouted "come in."

He stood in the doorway, a vision of loveliness in his black striped coat and pinstriped trousers. He glanced round fastidiously at my cracked lino, peeling wallpaper, the net curtain that was hanging down on one side of the small greasy window. Well, he had a right. He paid the rent, after all.

I didn't get up. "Hullo, mein Gottfried," I said.

"Hullo, old man," He came in. Sat down on my armchair like a man performing an emergency appendectomy with a rusty razor

blade. He lit a Sobranie.

As an afterthought he flung the packet to me. I took one, lit it and shoved the packet under the mattress.

"I thought I'd look in," he said.

"How sweet of you. It must be two years now. Still, Christmas is the time for the family, isn't it?"

"Well, quite ... How are you?"

"Rubbing along, thanks, Godfrey. And you?"

"Not too bad."

The scene galled me. When we were young, before the war, we had been friends. Even if we hadn't been, brothers were still brothers. It wasn't that I minded hating my brother, that's common enough. It was that I didn't hate him the way brothers hate. I hated him coldly and sickly.

At that moment I would have liked to fall on him and throttle him, but only in the cold, satisfied way you rake down a flypaper studded with flies.

Besides I still couldn't see why he had come.

"How's the — playing?" he asked.

"Not bad, you know. I'm at the Merrie Englande these days."

"So I heard."

Hullo, I thought, I see glimmers of light. He saw I saw them — he was, after all, my brother.

"I wondered if you'd like some lunch," he said.

Normally I would have refused, but I knew he might stay and catch Frenchy coming back. So I pretended to hesitate. "All right, hungry enough for anything."

We went down the cracked steps and walked up Park Lane. The drizzle had stopped and a cold sun had come out and made the street look even more depressing. Boarded up hotels, looted shops, cracked façades, grass growing in the broken streets, bent lamp standards, the park itself a tangled forest of weeds. It was sordid.

"Thinking of cleaning up, ever, Godfrey?" I asked.

"Not my department," he said.

"Someone ought to."

"No man-power, you see," he said. I bet, I thought. Naturally they left it. One look was enough to break anyone's morale. If you were wondering how defeated and broken you were and looked at Park Lane, or Piccadilly, or Trafalgar Square, you'd soon know — completely.

Godfrey took me to a sandwich-and-soup place on the corner. A glance and the man behind the counter knew him for an FP holder. So the food wasn't bad, although Godfrey picked at it like a man used to something better.

Conversation stopped. The customers bent their shoulders over their plates of sandwiches and munched stolidly. Godfrey didn't seem to notice. He probably never had noticed. I had to face facts — although a member of my own family, Godfrey had always been a kraut psychologically. Always neat, always methodical, jumping his hurdles — exams, tests and assignments at work — like a trained horse. It wasn't that he didn't care about other people — I can't say I did — he just never knew there was anything to care about.

"How's the department?" I asked, beginning the ridiculous question and answer game again — as if either of us worried about anything to do with the other.

"Going well."

"And Andrea?"

"She's well."

She ought to be, I thought. Fat cow. She'd married Godfrey for his steady civil service job and made a far better bargain than she'd thought.

"What about you — are you thinking of getting married?"

I stared at him. Who married these days unless they had a steady job at one of the factories or on road transport, or, of course, in the police?

"Not exactly. Haven't really got the means to keep my bride in the accustomed manner."

"Oh," said Godfrey. Watch it, I thought. I knew that expression. "Oh, they said Sebastian'd been riding Celeste's bike, mother."

"Oh, father, I thought you'd given Seb *permission* to go out climbing."

"I mentioned it because they told me you were engaged to a singer at the Merrie Englande."

"Who are they?"

"Well, my private secretary, as a matter of fact. He's a customer."

Yeah, I thought, like a rag-and-bone-man's a customer at the Ritz. He'd heard it from some spy.

"Well," I said. "I can't think how he managed to get that idea. I'm not sure there is a regular singer at the Merrie ... "

"This girl was supposed to be like you — a sort of casual entertainer. A German girl I think he said."

Too specific, chum. That line might just work with a stranger — not with your little brother.

"I think I've met her. In fact I've played for her once or twice. I don't know much about her, though. I'm certainly not engaged to her."

Godfrey bit into a sandwich. I'd closed that line of enquiry. He was wondering how to open another.

"That's a relief. She sounds a tramp."

"Maybe."

"We want to repatriate her — know where she is?"

"Why should I?" I said. "Apart from that, why should I help you? If she doesn't want to be repatriated, that's her business."

"Be realistic, Sebby — anyway, she does want to be, or she would do, if she knew. Her aunt's died and left her a lot of money. The other side has asked us to let her know so she can go home and sort out her affairs."

I went on drinking soup, but I wondered. Perhaps the story was true. Still, I didn't need to put Godfrey on to her — I could tell her myself.

"Well, I'll tell her if I see her. I doubt if I shall. I should leave a message at the Merrie."

"Yes."

He looked up broodingly, staring round in that blank way people have when they're bored with their eating companion.

I followed his gaze. My eyes lit on Frenchy, Loaded with parcels, she was buying food and having a flask filled with coffee at the counter. I went rigid. Frenchy had gained confidence — she was buying like an FP holder. And anyone with that amount of stuff on them attracted attention anyway. She was attracting it all right. Godfrey was the only man in the room who wasn't looking at her and pretending not to. He was just looking at her. I couldn't decide if he was watching her like a cat or just watching.

"Heard about Freddy Gore," I said.

"No," said Godfrey, not taking his eyes off her.

"He committed suicide," I said.

"Well I'm damned," said Godfrey, looking at me greedily. "Why?"

"It was his wife. He came home one afternoon ... " I spoke on hastily. Frenchy was still buying. Half the customers were still pointedly ignoring her — apart from anything else she looked quite good in her new gear. She picked up her stuff and left without showing her FP to the man behind the counter. She left without Godfrey noticing. I brought my tale of lust, adultery, rape and murder in the Gore family to a speedy close. A horrible thought had struck me. Godfrey was a high-up. He knew about Frenchy and he knew I knew her. There were a lot of cops on the job and he might have fixed it so that some were watching my hotel. Somehow I had to shift him and catch. Frenchy before she got back.

"Shocking story," said Godfrey, looking at his watch. "I must be getting back. Like a lift?"

"Not going in that direction," I said. "Thanks all the same."

So he flagged down a passing car and told the sulky driver to take him to Buckingham Palace — the krauts had restored it at huge

expense for the Ministry of Security as well as our paternal governor.

I walked slowly down the road, turned off and ran like hell. I caught Frenchy, all burdened with parcels, just in time.

"Better not go back," I gasped. "They may be watching the hotel."

There was a car standing outside a house just down the street. I ran her up to it and tugged at the door. It wasn't locked. I shoved her in, paper bags, flask and all, and got in the driving seat.

A stocky man ran out of the house. He had a revolver in his hand. I started up. Frenchy had the passport out. I grabbed it and waved it at the man with the gun.

"Full passport!" I yelled.

He stood staring at the back of the car. He didn't even dare snarl.

"What makes you think they're watching the hotel?" she asked.

I told her about Godfrey.

She frowned. "I must be right about having to run."

"Are you sure it isn't this legacy they say you've inherited?"

"I've only got one aunt and she's broke. Besides, why should your brother get involved in such a silly little business?"

"Because your father's so important. Or perhaps Papa just wants you home and made up the aunt business to cover up the fact that you're his no-good daughter who's drifting about in occupied territory, dragging the family name in the mud behind her."

"Could be. It's not though. I'm still not sure — you'll have to believe me. In the past I've been — well — important. It's to do with that, I know."

"What sort of important?"

She began to cry, great, racking sobs which bent her double.

"Don't ask me — oh, don't ask me."

I got hard-hearted. "Come on, Frenchy. Why should I break the law for you?"

"I don't want to remember — I can't remember," she gasped.

"Nuts. You can remember if you want to."

"I can't. I don't want to."

I passed her my handkerchief silently. How important could she have been — at 20 years old? She must have been at school until a couple of years ago.

"Where did you go to school?" I asked, more to pass time than anything.

"I was at the Berlin Gymnasium for Girls. When I was 13, I — they took me away."

Then the tears stopped and when I glanced at her, she had fainted. I pushed her back so that she was sitting comfortably, and drove on.

As dark came we reached Histon, just outside Cambridge, and

spent the night in the car, parked beside a hedge, inside a field.

When I woke next morning there was a rifle barrel in my ear.

"Oh, Gawd," I said. "What's this?"

A hand opened the car door and dragged me out. I lay on the ground with the barrel pointing at my belly. Above the barrel was a red face topped by a trilby hat. It wasn't a copper anyway.

I glanced sideways at the car. Inside, Frenchy was sitting up. Outside another man pointed a rifle at her temple, through the open window.

"What's all this about?" I said.

"Who're you?" the man said. "Sebastian Lowry and Frenchy Steiner," I said.

"What're you here for?"

"Just riding — "

The gun barrel dropped. The man was looking at his friend.

Then I saw — Frenchy had her passport out.

He touched his hat and retreated quickly, mumbling apologies. So I got back in the car and we snuggled up and back to sleep.

When we woke up, we had coffee from the flask, and a sandwich. Then we walked round the field. One or two birds cheeped from the bare hedges and our feet sank into ploughed furrows. It was silent and lonely. We walked round and round, breathing deeply.

We sat down and looked out over the big, flat field, sharing a bar of chocolate.

Frenchy smiled at me — a real smile, not her usual tense grin. I smiled back. We sat on. No noise, no people, no grimy, cracked buildings, no cops. A pale sun was high in the sky. The birds cheeped. I took Frenchy's hand. It felt strange, to be holding someone's hand again. It was warm and dry. Her fingers gripped mine. I stared at the pale, pointed profile beside me, and the long, messy blonde hair. Then I looked at the field again. We started a second bar of chocolate. Frenchy yawned. The silence went on and on. And on and on.

I was staring numbly across the acres of brown earth when Frenchy's hand clenched painfully on mine.

Slowly, from behind every bush, like the characters in some monstrous, silent film, the cops were rising. On all sides, over the bare bushes came a pair of blue shoulders, topped by a helmet. They rose slowly until they were standing. Then they moved silently forward. They tightened in.

Frenchy and I rose. The circle closed. To keep in the centre we had to move over to the road. Slowly they drove us out of the field, past our car, through the gate and on to the road. No one spoke. All we heard was the sound of their boots on the earth. Their faces were

rigid, like cops' faces always are.

Coming through the gate, we saw the reception committee. Three of them. My friend Inspector Braun, all knife-edged creases and polished buttons, and brother Godfrey. And then a short fat man I didn't know. He was wearing a well-cut suit and power, as they say, was written all over him, from his small, neatly shod feet, to his balding head.

Frenchy stepped up to the group. "Hullo, father," she said in German.

"Hullo, Franziska. We've found you at last, I see."

Godfrey smirked. Extra rations for good old Gottfried tomorrow. Maybe the Iron Cross.

So I thought I'd embarrass him. "Hi, Godfrey, old man."

"Morning, Sebastian." How he wished I wasn't shaking his hand. "We're parked up the road. Come on."

So we walked up the road to the shiny blue car that would take us back to God knew where — or what.

How silently they must have moved. What bloody fools we'd been not to get away after those two farmers had copped us. Godfrey and friends had probably had bulletins out for us all morning.

I sat at the back, between Godfrey and the Inspector. Frenchy was in front with her father and the driver.

"It's nice to know officialdom has its more human side," I remarked. "To think that deputy security minister, a CID Inspector and 50 coppers should all come out on a cold winter's morning to see a young girl gets the legacy that's rightfully hers."

Godfrey said nothing. He merely looked important. From the way Braun didn't grip my arm and the driver didn't keep glancing over his shoulder to see who I was coshing, I got the impression this wasn't a hanging charge. There was a sort of alligator grin in the air — cops taking home a naughty under-age couple who had run off to get married — not that cops did that kind of little social service job these days, but, wistfully, they kept trying to make you think so.

But what *was* the set-up? In front Frenchy had given up talking to her father — he cut every remark off at source. Why? No family rows in public? Frenchy, what I could see of her, looked like a girl on a cart bound for the scaffold. Her father looked like a man determined to knock some sense into his daughter's flighty head as soon as he got her home. Godfrey merely looked pontifical. Braun looked official.

Frenchy tried again. "Father. I *can't* go — "

"Be quiet!" said her father. Godfrey was listening hard. Suddenly I got the picture. *Godfrey and Braun didn't know what it was all about*. And Frenchy's father didn't want them to.

It must be really something, then, I thought.

There was silence all the way back to London. What about me? I thought. I'm just not in this at all. But I bet it's me who takes the rap. The car stopped in Trafalgar Square. Frenchy and her father got out. He hurried her up the steps of the Goering Hotel. Her eyes were burning like coals.

Then Godfrey and Braun pulled me out. "You'll be in a suite here till we decide what to do with you," Godfrey said in a low voice. "Don't worry. I'll do what I can to help."

I won't say tears came to my eyes — I knew just how far he would go to help. I said goodbye to him and Braun led me up the marble steps. The place was crowded with neat soldiery. We were joined by the hotel manager and two coppers. We went up to the top storey and I was shown my suite. Three rooms and a bathroom. Quite a nice little shack, although somewhat Teutonically furnished. It was elegant, but there was the smell of loot about it. You kept wondering which bit of furniture covered the bloodstains where they'd bayonetted the Countess and her kids one morning.

Then the two policemen stationed themselves, one at the door and one inside with me. That wasn't so pleasant. I wondered when the cop was going to suggest a hand of nap to while away the time before the execution. I looked about appreciatively, sat down on the blue silk sofa and said "What now?"

A waiter came in with tea and toast. One cup. I asked the cop if he'd like some. He refused. As I went to pour out my second cup I saw why, because the room began to spin, "This hotel isn't what it was," I muttered and fell down.

I woke up next morning in a fourposter. Frenchy, in a red silk nightdress and negligee was bending over me with a cup of coffee. I hauled myself up, noticing my blue silk pyjamas, and took the cup.

She sat down at the Louis XIV table beside the bed. She went on eating rolls and butter. Her hair, obviously washed, cascaded down her back like gold thread.

"Very nice," I said, handing back my cup for a refill. "If I didn't wonder whose Christmas dinner I was being fattened for. Where's the cop?"

"I sent him outside."

I began to glance round. The windows were barred.

"You can't get out. The place is heavily guarded and the cops will shoot you on sight."

"That's new?"

She ignored me. "You're quite safe as long as you're with me. I've told them I've got to have you with me."

"That's nice. How long will you be around?"

"I thought you'd spot a snag."

"Look, Frenchy. I think you'd better tell me what this is about. It's my carcass after all."

"I will," she said calmly. "Prepare yourself for surprises." She seemed very matter of fact, but her face had the calm of a woman who's just had a baby, the pain and shock were over, but she knew this was really only the beginning of the trouble.

"I told you I was at a gymnasium in Berlin until I was 13. Then I began seeing visions. Of course, the tutors didn't make much of it at first. It's not too unusual in girls at the beginning of puberty. The trouble was, they weren't the usual kind of visions. I used to see tables surrounded by German officers. I used to overhear conferences. I saw tanks going into battle, burning cities, concentration camps — things I couldn't possibly know about. Then, one night, my room-mate heard me talking English in my sleep. I was talking about battle plans, using military terms and English slang I also couldn't possibly have known. She told the House Leader. The House Leader told my father, who was then only a captain in the S.S. Father was an intelligent man. He took me to Karl Ossietz, one of the Leader's chief soothsayers. A month later I was installed in a suite at headquarters. I was dressed in a white linen dress, my hair was bound with a gold band. I'd become part of the German myth ...

"I was the virgin who prophesied to Attilla, I was thirteen years old and I lived like a ritual captive for four years, officiating at sacrifices and Teutonic Saturnalia, watching goats have their throats cut with gold knives, seeing torch light on the walls — all that. And I thought it was marvellous, to be helping the cause like that. I went into a kind of mystic dream where I was an Aryan queen helping her nation to victory. And in my midnight conferences with the Leader I prophesied, I told him not to attack Russia — I knew he would be defeated. I told him where to concentrate his forces to use them to their best effect. Oh, and much, much more ...

"Also only I could soothe him when his attacks of mania came on — by putting my hands on him the way I did for you the other day. I'm not a real healer. I can't cure the body. But I can reach into overtaxed or unstable minds and take away the tightness.

"When the war ended, I just left in a daze. They thought they didn't really need me at that time. There was something in the back of my mind — I don't know what it was — made me come here, with my passport, my safe conducts, my letters of introduction ... When I saw what I had done to you all — what could I do? I tried to kill myself and failed — maybe I wasn't trying hard enough. Then I tried to live with you, simply because I couldn't think of anything else to do. A

stronger person might have thought of practical ways to help — but I'd spent four years in an atmosphere of blood and hysteria, calling on the psychic part of me and ignoring the rest. I was unfit for life. I just tried to forget everything that had ever happened to me."

She shrugged. "That's it."

I stared at her, feeling a horrible pity. She knew she had been used to kill millions of people and reduce a dozen nations to slavery. And she had got to live with it.

"What's it all about now?" I asked.

"They need me again. There must be desperate problems to be solved. Or the Leader's madness is getting worse. Or both. That's why I felt if I could disappear for a month it would be all right. By that time no one could have cleared up the mess." She lit a cigarette, passed it to me and lit one for herself.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. If I don't help they'll torture me until I do. I'm not strong enough to resist. But I can't, can't, *can't* co-operate any more. If I had the guts I'd kill myself but I haven't. Anyway, they've taken away anything I could use to do it. That's why all the windows are barred — it's not to stop you escaping. It's to stop me from throwing myself out. I don't suppose you'd kill me quickly, so I wouldn't know anything about it?"

In a sense the idea was tempting. A chance to get back at the Leader with a vengeance. But I knew I couldn't kill poor, thin Frenchy.

I told her so. "I'm too kind-hearted," I said. "If I killed you, how could I go on hoping you'd have a better life?"

"I won't. If I'm needed they'll cage me again. And this time I'll have known freedom. I'll be back in robes, with incense and torchlight and all the time I'll be able to remember being free — walking in the field at Histon, for example." I felt very sad. Then I felt even sadder — I was thinking about myself.

"What happens next?" I said.

"They'll fly me to Germany. You're coming too."

"Oh, no," I said. "Not Germany. I wouldn't stand a chance."

"What chance do you stand here? If I went and you stayed, you'd be shot the moment I left the building. They can't risk letting you go about with your story."

Her shoulders were bowed. She looked as if she had no inner resources left. "I'm sorry. It's my fault. I should have left you alone. If I'd never made you run away with me you'd be safe now."

That wasn't how I remembered it exactly, but I'd rather blame her than me for my predicament. I agreed, oh, how I agreed. Still, once a gent, always a gent. "Never mind that. I'll come and perhaps we can think of something." I was dubious about that, but by that time I was

too far in.

So at eleven that morning we left the hotel for the airport. From Berlin we went by limousine to the Leader's palace. I've never been so afraid in my life. It's one thing to go in daily danger of being shot, or sent to starve in a camp. It's another thing to fly straight into the centre of all the trouble. I was so afraid I could hardly speak. Not that anyone wanted to hear from me anyway. I was just a passenger — like a bullock on its way to the abattoir.

During the trip, Frenchy's father kept up a nervous machine-gun monologue of demands that she would co-operate and promises of a glorious future for her. Frenchy said nothing. She looked drained.

We arrived in the green courtyard of the palace. On the other side of the wall I heard the rush of a waterfall into a pool. The palace was half old German mansion, half modern Teutonic, with vulgar marble statues all over the place — supermen on super-horses. That's the nearest they'd got to the master-race, so far. A white haired old man led the jackbooted party which met us.

Frenchy smiled when she saw him, a child's smile. "Karl," she said. Even her voice was like the voice of a very young girl. I shuddered. The spell was beginning to operate again — that blank face, the voice of the little school girl. Oh, Frenchy, love, I sighed to myself. Don't let them do it to you. She was being led along by Karl Ossietz, across the green courtyard.

We made a peculiar gang. In front, Ossietz, tall and thin, with long white hair, and Frenchy, now looking so frail a breeze might blow her away. Behind them a group of begonged generals, all horribly familiar to me from seeing their portraits on pub signs. Just behind them rolled Frenchy's father, trying to join in. Then me, with two ordinary German cops. I caught myself feeling peeved that if I made a dash for it I'd be shot down by an ordinary cop.

Then Karl turned sharply back, stared at me and said: "Who's that?"

Her father said: "He's an Englishman. She wouldn't come without him."

Karl looked furious and terrified. His face began to crumble. "Are you lovers?" he shouted at Frenchy.

"No, Karl," she whispered. He stared long and deeply into her eyes, then nodded.

"They must be separated," he said to Frenchy's father.

Frenchy said nothing. Suddenly I felt more than concern for her — panic for myself. The only reason I'd come here was because she could protect me. Now she could, but she wasn't interested any more. So instead of being shot in England, I was going to be shot right outside the Leader's front door. Still, dead was dead, be it palace or

dustbin.

We entered the huge dark hall, full of figures in ancient armours and dark horrible little doors leading away to who knew where. The mosaic floor almost smelt of blood. My legs practically gave way under me, I saw Frenchy being led up the marble staircase. I felt tears come to my eyes — for her, for me, for both of us.

Then they took me along a corridor and up the back stairs. They shoved me through a door. I stood there for several minutes. Then I looked round. Well, it wasn't a rat-haunted oubliette, at any rate. In fact it was the double of my suite at the Goering Hotel. Same thick carpets, heavy antique furniture, even — I poked my head round the door — the same fourposter. Obviously they picked up their furniture at all the little chateaux and castles they happened to run across on a Saturday morning march.

In the bedroom, torches burned. I took off my clothes and got into bed. I was asleep.

The first thing I saw as I awoke was that the torches were burning down. Then I saw Frenchy, naked as a peeled wand, pulling back the embroidered covers and coming into bed. Then I felt her warmth beside me.

"Do it for me," she murmured. "Please."

"What?"

"Take me," she whispered.

"Eh?" I was somewhat shocked. People like Frenchy and me had a code. This wasn't part of it.

"Oh, please," she said, pressing her long body against me. "It's so important."

"Oh — let's have a fag."

She sank back. "Haven't got any," came her sulky voice.

I found some in my pocket and we lit up. "May as well drop the ash on the carpet," I said. "Not much point in behaving nicely so we'll be asked again." I was purposely being irrelevant. Code or no code the situation was beginning to affect me. I tried to concentrate on my imminent death. It had the opposite effect.

"I don't understand, love," I said, taking her hand.

"I had to crawl over the roof to get here," she said, rather annoyed.

"It can't just be passion," I suggested politely.

"Didn't you hear — ?"

"My God," I said. "Ossietz. Do you mean that if you're not a virgin, you can't prophesy?"

"I don't know — he seems to think so. It's my only chance. He'll make me do whatever he wants me to — but if I can't perform, if it

seems the power's gone — it won't matter. They may shoot me, but it will be a quick death."

"Don't be so dramatic, love." I put my cigarette out on the bed head and took her in my arms. "I love you, Frenchy." I said. And it was quite true. I did.

That was the best night of my life. Frenchy was sweet, and actually so was I. It was a relief to drop the mask for a few hours. As dawn came through the windows she lay in our tangled bed like a piece of pale wreckage.

She smiled at me and I smiled back. I gave her a kiss. "A man who would do anything for his country," she grinned.

"How are you going to get back?" I said.

"I thought I'd go back over the roof — but now I'm not sure I'll ever walk again."

I said: "Have I hurt you?"

"Like hell. I'll bluff my way out. The guards will be tired and I doubt if they know anything. Anyway all roads lead to the same destination now."

I began to cry. That's the thing about an armadillo — underneath his flesh is more tender than a bear's. Not that I cared if I cried, or if she cried, or if the whole palace rang with sobs. The torches were guttering out.

She stood naked beside the bed. Then she put on her clothes, said goodbye. I heard her speaking authoritatively outside the door, heels clicking, and then her feet going along the corridor.

I just went on crying. Her meeting with the Leader was in two hours time. If I went on crying for two hours I wouldn't have to think about it all.

I couldn't. By the time the guard came in with my breakfast, I was dressed and dry-eyed. He looked through the open door at the bed and gave a wink. He said something in German I couldn't understand, so I knew the words weren't in the dictionary. I stared at the bed and my stomach lurched. It seemed a bit rude to feel lust for a woman who was going to die.

Then I realised my condition was getting critical, so I ate my breakfast to bring me to my senses. The four last things, that was what I ought to be thinking about. What were they?

Suddenly I thought of the woman with the baby in the park. If Frenchy couldn't help the Leader, perhaps he'd go. Perhaps they'd lead a better life.

I paced the floor, wondering what was happening now.

This was what was happening ...

Frenchy was bathed, dressed in a white linen robe with a red

cloak and led down to the great hall.

The Leader was sitting on a dais in a heavy wooden chair. His arms were extended along the arms of the chair, his face held the familiar look of stern command, now a cracking façade covering decay and lunacy.

On his lips were traces of foam. Around him were his advisors, belted and booted, robed and capped or blonde and dressed in sub-valkyrie silk dresses. The court of the mad king — the atmosphere was hung with heavy incomprehensibilities. Led by her father and Karl Ossietz, Frenchy approached the dais.

"We — need — you — " the Leader grunted. His court held their places by will power. They were terrified, and with good reason. The hall had seen terrible things in the past year. There were, too, one or two faces blankly waiting for the outcome. As the old pack-leader sickens, the younger wolves start to plan.

"We — have — sought — you for — half a year," the grating, half-human voice went on. "We need your predictions. We need your — *health!*"

His eyes stared into hers. He leapt up with a cry. "Help! Help! Help!" His voice rang round the hall. More foam appeared at his lips. His face twisted.

"Go forward to the Leader," Karl Ossietz ordered.

Frenchy stepped forward. The court looked at her, hoping.

"Help! Help!" the mad, uncontrollable voice went on. He fell back, writhing in his throne.

"I can't help," she said in a clear voice.

Karl's whisper came, smooth and terrifying, in her ear: "Go forward!"

She went forward, compelled by the voice. Then she stopped again.

"I can't help." She turned to Ossietz. "Can I Karl? You can see?"

He stared at her in horror, then at the writhing man, making animal noises on the dais, then back at Frenchy Steiner.

"You — you — you have fallen ... " he whispered. "No. No, she cannot help!" he called. "The girl is no longer a virgin — her power has gone!"

The court looked at the Leader, then at Frenchy.

In a moment, chaos had broken out. Women screamed — there was a rush to the heavy doors. Men's voices rose, shouted. Then came the crack of the first gun, followed by others. In a moment the hall was milling and ringing with shots, groans and shouts.

On the dais, the Leader lay, twisting and uttering guttural moans. The pack was at frenzied war. Those who had considered the Leader immortal — and many had — were bewildered, terrified. Those who

had planned to succeed him now hardly knew what to do. Several of them shot themselves there and then.

I was lying on the bed smoking when Frenchy ran in, slammed and bolted the doors behind the guards and her pursuers. Her hair was dishevelled, she held the scarlet cloak round her. "Out of the window," she yelled, ripping it off. Underneath, her white dress was in ribbons.

I got up on to the window-sill and helped her after me. I looked down towards the courtyard far below. I clung to the sill.

"Go on!"

I reached out and got a grip on a drainpipe. I began to slide down it, the metal chafing my hands. She followed.

At the bottom, I paused, helped her down the last few feet and pointed at a staff car that was parked near the gates. Guards had left the gates and were probably taking part in the indoor festivities. There was only one there and he hadn't seen us. He was looking warily out along the road, as if expecting attack.

We skipped over the lawn and got into the car. I started up.

At the gate, the guard, seeing a general's insignia on the car, automatically stepped aside. Then he saw us, did a double-take, and it was too late. We roared down that road, away from there.

The road ahead was clear.

True to form, Frenchy had found and put on an officer's white mac from the back seat.

I slowed down. There was no point in doing 80 towards any danger on the road.

"And have you lost your power?" I asked her.

"Don't know," she gave me an irresponsible grin.

"What was going on below? It sounded like a battlefield."

She told me.

"The Leader's finished. His successors are fighting among themselves. This is the end of the Thousand Year Reich." She grinned again. "I did it."

"Oh, come now," I protested. "Anyway I think we'll try to get back to England?"

"Why?"

"Because if the Empire's crumbling, England will go first. It's an island. They'll withdraw the legions to defend the Empire — it's traditional."

"Can we make it?"

"Not now. We'll get out of Germany and then lie low for a few days until the news leaks out in France. Once things start to break down, the organisation will disintegrate and we'll get help.

We bowled on merrily, whistling and singing.

'Frenchy Steiner' was Hilary Bailey's first U.S. publication (reprinted in The Saint, 1966, *from* The Best of New Worlds); *her most recent was 'Dr. Gelabius' in* England Swings SF. *In private life, Miss Bailey is Mrs. Michael Moorcock, wife of the editor of* New Worlds *— but life for the Moorcocks is seldom private, with Britain's controversial new 'magazine of speculative fiction' doing most of its growing in the middle of their living-room floor.*

Bob Shaw is not-quite-British: a North Irish journalist — columnist and science correspondent for The Belfast Telegraph *— and author of perhaps a dozen short stories and one novel,* Night Walk *(Banner, 1966). Although his first fiction sale in 1953 was to the* New York Post, *he was almost unknown in the U.S. until 'Light of Other Days' appeared in* Analog, *and was promptly selected for inclusion in both* The World's Best Science Fiction: 1967 (Ace) *and* Nebula Award Stories Two *(Doubleday) — as well as being a (very close) runner-up for both the Hugo and Nebula awards in 1966.*

One extraordinary thing about the story is that it is actually *science fiction. Time-travel, long a favourite device (with or without magical or scientifabulous vehicles) for both classical and contemporary fabulators, philosophers, and science fiction writers, has lately gone the way of the Bug-eyed Monster: out of print onto the screen. But the topic of Time itself — its phenomenology, properties, effects, metaphysics — is as hot in the laboratories and academies as it is pervasive in new speculative fiction. (Especially in Britain: Fred Hoyle's* October the First Is Too Late; *Aldiss' 'Man in His Time' and* Cryptozoic; *almost anything by Ballard or Langdon Jones. In America, one thinks primarily of Dick, Leiber, and Delany.) 'Light of Other Days' incorporates a plausible, intriguing, and* new *idea about the physics of light in relation to Time.*

Light of other Days
Bob Shaw

Leaving the village behind, we followed the heady sweeps of the road up into a land of slow glass.

I had never seen one of the farms before and at first found them slightly eerie — an effect heightened by imagination and circumstance. The car's turbine was pulling smoothly and quietly in the damp air so that we seemed to be carried over the convolutions of the road in a kind of supernatural silence. On our right the mountain sifted down into an incredibly perfect valley of timeless pine, and everywhere stood the great frames of slow glass, drinking light. An occasional flash of afternoon sunlight on their wind bracing created an illusion of movement, but in fact the frames were deserted. The rows of windows had been standing on the hillside for years, staring into the valley, and men only cleaned them in the middle of the night when their human presence would not matter to the thirsty glass.

They were fascinating, but Selina and I didn't mention the windows. I think we hated each other so much we both were reluctant to sully anything new by drawing it into the nexus of our emotions. The holiday, I had begun to realise, was a stupid idea in the first place. I had thought it would cure everything, but, of course, it didn't stop Selina being pregnant and, worst still, it didn't even stop her being angry about being pregnant.

Rationalising our dismay over her condition, we had circulated the usual statements to the effect that we would have *liked* having children — but later on, at the proper time. Selina's pregnancy had cost us her well-paid job and with it the new house we had been negotiating and which was far beyond the reach of my income from poetry. But the real source of our annoyance was that we were face to face with the realisation that people who say they want children later always mean they want children never. Our nevers were thrumming with the knowledge that we, who had thought ourselves so unique, had fallen into the same biological trap as every mindless rutting creature which ever existed.

The road took us along the southern slopes of Ben Cruachan until we began to catch glimpses of the gray Atlantic far ahead. I had just cut our speed to absorb the view better when I noticed the sign spiked to a gatepost. It said: 'SLOW GLASS — QUALITY HIGH, PRICES LOW — J. R. HAGAN.' On an impulse I stopped the car on the verge, wincing slightly as tough grasses whipped noisily at the bodywork.

"Why have we stopped?" Selina's neat, smoke-silver head turned in surprise.

"Look at that sign. Let's go up and see what there is. The stuff might be reasonably priced out here."

Selina's voice was pitched high with scorn as she refused, but I was too taken with my idea to listen. I had an illogical conviction that doing something extravagant and crazy would set us right again.

"Come on," I said, "the exercise might do us some good. We've been driving too long anyway."

She shrugged in a way that hurt me and got out of the car. We walked up a path made of irregular, packed clay steps nosed with short lengths of sapling. The path curved through trees which clothed the edge of the hill and at its end we found a low farmhouse. Beyond the little stone building tall frames of slow glass gazed out towards the voice-stilling sight of Cruachan's ponderous descent towards the waters of Loch Linnhe. Most of the panes were perfectly transparent but a few were dark, like panels of polished ebony.

As we approached the house through a neat cobbled yard a tall middle-aged man in ash-coloured tweeds arose and waved to us. He had been sitting on the low rubble wall which bounded the yard, smoking a pipe and staring towards the house. At the front window of the cottage a young woman in a tangerine dress stood with a small boy in her arms, but she turned uninterestedly and moved out of sight as we drew near.

"Mr. Hagan?" I guessed.

"Correct. Come to see some glass, have you? Well, you've come to the right place." Hagan spoke crisply, with traces of the pure highland accent which sounds so much like Irish to the unaccustomed ear. He had one of those calmly dismayed faces one finds on elderly road-menders and philosophers.

"Yes," I said. "We're on holiday. We saw your sign."

Selina, who usually has a natural fluency with strangers, said nothing. She was looking towards the now empty window with what I thought was a slightly puzzled expression.

"Up from London, are you? Well, as I said, you've come to the right place — and at the right time, too. My wife and I don't see many people this early in the season."

I laughed. "Does that mean we might be able to buy a little glass without mortgaging our home?"

"Look at that now," Hagan said, smiling helplessly. "I've thrown away any advantage I might have had in the transaction. Rose, that's my wife, says I never learn. Still, let's sit down and talk it over." He pointed at the rubble wall, then glanced doubtfully at Selina's immaculate blue skirt. "Wait till I fetch a rug from the house." Hagan

limped quickly into the cottage, closing the door behind him.

"Perhaps it wasn't such a marvelous idea to come up here," I whispered to Selina,, "but you might at least be pleasant to the man. I think I can smell a bargain."

"Some hope," she said with deliberate coarseness. "Surely even you must have noticed that ancient dress his wife is wearing! He won't give much away to strangers."

"Was that his wife?"

"Of course that was his wife."

"Well, well," I said, surprised. "Anyway, try to be civil with him. I don't want to be embarrassed."

Selina snorted, but she smiled whitely when Hagan reappeared and I relaxed a little. Strange how a man can love a woman and yet at the same time pray for her to fall under a train.

Hagan spread a tartan blanket on the wall and we sat down, feeling slightly self-conscious at having been translated from our city-oriented lives into a rural tableau. On the distant slate of the Loch, beyond the watchful frames of slow glass, a slow-moving steamer drew a white line towards the south. The boisterous mountain air seemed almost to invade our lungs, giving us more oxygen than we required.

"Some of the glass farmers around here," Hagan began, "give strangers, such as yourselves, a sales talk about how beautiful the autumn is in this part of Argyll. Or it might be the spring or the winter. I don't do that — any fool knows that a place which doesn't look right in summer never looks right. What do you say?"

I nodded compliantly.

"I want you just to take a good look out towards Mull, Mr ... "

"Garland."

" ... Garland. That's what you're buying if you buy my glass, and it never looks better than it does at this minute. The glass is in perfect phase, none of it is less than ten years thick — and a four-foot window will cost you two hundred pounds."

"*Two hundred!*" Selina was shocked. "That's as much as they charge at the Scenedow shop in Bond Street."

Hagan smiled patiently, then looked closely at me to see if I knew enough about slow glass to appreciate what he had been saying. His price had been much higher than I had hoped — but *ten years thick!* The cheap glass one found in places like the Vistaplex and Pane-o-rama stores usually consisted of a quarter of an inch of ordinary glass faced with a veneer of slow glass perhaps only ten or twelve months thick.

"You don't understand, darling," I said, already determined to buy. "This glass will last ten years and it's in phase."

"Doesn't that only mean it keeps time?"

Hagan smiled at her again, realising he had no further necessity to bother with me. "Only, you say! Pardon me, Mrs. Garland, but you don't seem to appreciate the miracle, the genuine honest-to-goodness miracle, of engineering precision needed to produce a piece of glass in phase. When I say the glass is ten years thick it means it takes light ten years to pass through it. In effect, each one of those panes is ten light-years thick — more than twice the distance to the nearest star — so a variation in actual thickness of only a millionth of an inch would ... "

He stopped talking for a moment and sat quietly looking towards the house. I turned my head from the view of the Loch and saw the young woman standing at the window again. Hagan's eyes were filled with a kind of greedy reverence which made me feel uncomfortable and at the same time convinced me Selina had been wrong. In my experience husbands never looked at wives that way — at least, not at their own.

The girl remained in view for a few seconds, dress glowing warmly, then moved back into the room. Suddenly I received a distinct, though inexplicable, impression she was blind. My feeling was that Selina and I were perhaps blundering through an emotional interplay as violent as our own.

"I'm sorry," Hagan continued; "I thought Rose was going to call me for something. Now, where was I, Mrs. Garland? Ten light-years compressed into a quarter of an inch means ... "

I ceased to listen, partly because I was already sold, partly because I had heard the story of slow glass many times before and had never yet understood the principles involved. An acquaintance with scientific training had once tried to be helpful by telling me to visualise a pane of slow glass as a hologram which did not need coherent light from a laser for the reconstitution of its visual information, and in which every photon of ordinary light passed through a spiral tunnel coiled outside the radius of capture of each atom in the glass. This gem of, to me, incomprehensibility not only told me nothing, it convinced me once again that a mind as non-technical as mine should concern itself less with causes than effects.

The most important effect, in the eyes of the average individual, was that light took a long time to pass through a sheet of slow glass. A new piece was always jet black because nothing had yet come through, but one could stand the glass beside, say, a woodland lake until the scene emerged, perhaps a year later. If the glass was then removed and installed in a dismal city flat, the flat would — for that year — appear to overlook the woodland lake. During the year it

wouldn't be merely a very realistic but still picture — the water would ripple in sunlight, silent animals would come to drink, birds would cross the sky, night would follow day, season would follow season. Until one day, a year later, the beauty held in the subatomic pipelines would be exhausted and the familiar gray city-scape would reappear.

Apart from its stupendous novelty value, the commercial success of slow glass was founded on the fact that having a scenedow was the exact emotional equivalent of owning land. The meanest cave dweller could look out on misty parks — and who was to say they weren't his? A man who really owns tailored gardens and estates doesn't spend his time proving his ownership by crawling on his ground, feeling, smelling, tasting it. All he receives from the land are light patterns, and with scenedows those patterns could be taken into coal mines, submarines, prison cells.

On several occasions I have tried to write short pieces about the enchanted crystal but, to me, the theme is so ineffably poetic as to be, paradoxically, beyond the reach of poetry — mine, at any rate. Besides, the best songs and verse had already been written, with prescient inspiration, by men who had died long before slow glass was discovered. I had no hope of equaling, for example, Moore with his:

> *Oft in the stilly night,*
> *Ere slumber's chain has bound me,*
> *Fond Memory brings the light*
> *Of other days around me ...*

It took only a few years for slow glass to develop from a scientific curiosity to a sizable industry. And much to the astonishment of we poets — those of us who remain convinced that beauty lives though lilies die — the trappings of that industry were no different from those of any other. There were good scenedows which cost a lot of money, and there were inferior scenedows which cost rather less. The thickness, measured in years, was an important factor in the cost but there was also the question of *actual* thickness, or phase.

Even with the most sophisticated engineering techniques available thickness control was something of a hit-and-miss affair. A coarse discrepancy could mean that a pane intended to be five years thick might be five and a half, so that light which entered in summer emerged in winter, a fine discrepancy could mean that noon sunshine emerged at midnight. These incompatibilities had their peculiar charm — many night workers, for example, liked having their own private time zones — but, in general, it cost more to buy scenedows which kept closely in step with real time.

Selina still looked unconvinced when Hagan had finished

speaking. She shook her head almost imperceptibly and I knew he had been using the wrong approach. Quite suddenly the pewter helmet of her hair was disturbed by a cool gust of wind, and huge clean tumbling drops of rain began to spang round us from an almost cloudless sky.

"I'll give you a cheque now," I said abruptly, and saw Selina's green eyes triangulate angrily on my face. "You can arrange delivery?"

"Aye, delivery's no problem," Hagan said, getting to his feet. "But wouldn't you rather take the glass with you?"

"Well, yes — if you don't mind." I was shamed by his readiness to trust my scrip.

"I'll unclip a pane for you. Wait here. It won't take long to slip it into a carrying frame." Hagan limped down the slope towards the seriate windows, through some of which the view towards Linnhe was sunny, while others were cloudy and a few pure black.

Selina drew the collar of her blouse closed at her throat. "The least he could have done was invite us inside. There can't be so many fools passing through that he can afford to neglect them."

I tried to ignore the insult and concentrated on writing the cheque. One of the outsize drops broke across my knuckles, splattering the pink paper.

"All right," I said, "let's move in under the eaves till he gets back." *You worm,* I thought as I felt the whole thing go completely wrong. *I just had to be a fool to marry you. A prize fool, a fool's fool — and now that you've trapped part of me inside you I'll never ever, never ever,* never ever *get away.*

Feeling my stomach clench itself painfully, I ran behind Selina to the side of the cottage. Beyond the window the neat living room, with its coal fire, was empty but the child's toys were scattered on the floor. Alphabet blocks and a wheelbarrow the exact colour of freshly pared carrots. As I stared in, the boy came running from the other room and began kicking the blocks. He didn't notice me. A few moments later the young woman entered the room and lifted him, laughing easily and wholeheartedly as she swung the boy under her arm. She came to the window as she had done earlier. I smiled self-consciously, but neither she nor the child responded.

My forehead prickled icily. *Could they both be blind?* I sidled away.

Selina gave a little scream and I spun towards her.

"The rug!" she said. "It's getting soaked."

She ran across the yard in the rain, snatched the reddish square from the dappling wall and ran back, towards the cottage door. Something heaved convulsively in my subconscious.

"Selina," I shouted. "Don't open it!"

But I was too late. She had pushed open the latched wooden door

and was standing, hand over mouth, looking into the cottage. I moved close to her and took the rug from her unresisting fingers.

As I was closing the door I left my eyes traverse the cottage's interior. The neat living room in which I had just seen the woman and child was, in reality, a sickening clutter of shabby furniture, old newspapers, cast-off clothing and smeared dishes. It was damp, stinking and utterly deserted. The only object I recognised from my view through the windows was the little wheelbarrow, paintless and broken.

I latched the door firmly and ordered myself to forget what I had seen. Some men who live alone are good housekeepers; others just don't know how.

Selina's face was white. "I don't understand. I don't understand it"

"Slow glass works both ways," I said gently. "Light passes out of a house, as well as in."

"You mean ... ?"

"I don't know. It isn't our business. Now steady up — Hagan's coming back with our glass." The churning in my stomach was beginning to subside.

Hagan came into the yard carrying an oblong, plastic-covered frame. I held the cheque out to him, but he was staring at Selina's face. He seemed to know immediately that our uncomprehending fingers had rummaged through his soul. Selina avoided his gaze. She was old and ill-looking, and her eyes stared determinedly towards the nearing horizon.

"I'll take the rug from you, Mr. Garland," Hagan finally said. "You shouldn't have troubled yourself over it."

"No trouble. Here's the cheque."

"Thank you." He was still looking at Selina with a strange kind of suspicion. "It's been a pleasure to do business with you."

"The pleasure was mine," I said with equal, senseless formality. I picked up the heavy frame and guided Selina towards the path which led to the road. Just as we reached the head of the now slippery steps Hagan spoke again.

"Mr. Garland!"

I turned unwillingly.

"It wasn't my fault," he said steadily. "A hit-and-run driver got them both, down on the Oban road six years ago. My boy was only seven when it happened. I'm entitled to keep some thing."

I nodded wordlessly and moved down the path, holding my wife close to me, treasuring the feel of her arms locked around me At the bend I looked back through the rain and saw Hagan sitting with squared shoulders on the wall where we had first seen him.

He was looking at the house, but I was unable to tell if there was

anyone at the window.

Take a word, a multiplex word: science-fiction.

In Popland, it's camp comics; for Sontag, horror films; UFO people claim it as kissing kin; news-media editorialists equate it generally with disquieting technological prediction. On TV it's space-geared Western or Tropic Isle adventure — or Spy Thrillers with aliens, robots or a mad scientist as The Enemy. Paperback buyers grab up two books a week of the TV type, and probably half again as much E. R. Burroughs-derived 'sword and sorcery' and 'Heroic fantasy'. Some paperbacks, and a few hardcovers, have made it into the 'underground' (campus and hippie trade), a very mixed bag where the Hobbits and Ubu *rub elbows with* Witzend, Nova Express, *and* Stranger in a Strange Land *— and with two-dollar soft-covers of Hawthorne, Lovecraft, and Mary Shelley for the Lit Profs who have decided (with the help of H. Bruce Franklin's* Future Perfect, *Oxford,* 1966) *that science fiction is* really *Neo-Victorian-Gothic.*

For some faithful 50,000 *fans, science fiction is (inclusively and almost exclusively) any thing published in the speciality magazines — where in fact there is rarely more than one story per issue (if that) which meets the requirements of that esoteric modern form,* science fiction. *For within the wide spread of contemporary 'nonrealstic' prose, there does remain a discrete discipline — 'hard-core science fiction' — with specialised, and rather demanding, parameters. It is no easier to define now than it was in the days of its glory, but it is readily recognisable — and dearly beloved — by those who, like myself, have identified most of their adult intellectual lives with it.* Vide: *'Light of Other Days'.*

It is not so easy to classify 'Beyond the Weeds'. Like Shaw, Peter Tate is a newspaperman: sub-editor of the Echo *in South Wales (also not-quite-British?). Both men are in their thirties. Tate perhaps five years the younger. But where Shaw — in style, content, publishing history — is typical of the best of the first generation of British s-f writers, Tate is almost the prototype of the young* New Worlds *writer: five of his first seven stories were in* NW *in 1966-67; but more to the point was his reply to my selection of 'The PostMortem People' (form* NW*) — this retitled and extensively rewritten version of a story already two years old, and hardly satisfactory, to a growing writer. His first novel,* The Thinking Seat, *will be published by Doubleday in 1968.*

Beyond the Weeds
Peter Tate

This time, Anton Hejar came by chance upon the event. He heard the shrill gathering of locked tires and was running before any sick-soft sound of impact. The car could be skidding, no more; but one could not afford to stand and wait. One had a reputation.

He shouldered a passage through the lazy-liners on the rotor walk even as a bundle with flapping limbs and thrown-back head turned spit-wise in the air. He was at curbside when the body landed close to his feet.

Hejar placed his overcoat gently to retain a little of the man's draining warmth.

"Somebody get an ambulance," he shouted, taking command of the situation while women grew pale and lazies changed to the brisker track and were borne smartly away.

The man's eyes flickered. A weak tongue licked vainly at lips grown dry as old parchment. Breath came like a flutter of moth's wings.

"How are you feeling?" asked Hejar.

The eyes searched for the speaker, blinked and blinked again to bring him into focus. The man tried to speak, but there was only a rattle like too many unsaid words fighting for an outlet.

Hejar sniffed the air. His nostrils, finely attuned to the necessities of his calling, could pick out death like hollyhock or new-made bread. Yes, it was there, dank and acrid as stale perspiration.

"No need to worry," he told the man. "You'll be all right."

He took off his jacket to make a pillow for the man's head.

"My ... wife ... she ... "

"Don't concern yourself," said Hejar. "Let's get you settled first."

He's kind, thought the man in his mind full of moist pain. Perhaps he just isn't trying to fool me with sentimentality. I feel so cold ...

The siren of the approaching ambulance rose and fell on a scale of panic. Hejar moved the man's head gently, looking for marks or a tell-tale run of blood from the ear. He found nothing. Good. The brain, then, the control centre was undamaged. Great.

He went through the pockets of the overcoat covering the man. From one he produced a small tin and opened it, exposing an inked pad. He manoeuvred digits on a rubber stamp.. The man moved feverishly beside him. "You'll be fine, old son," he said gently. "Help's just arriving."

Then he brought the rubber stamp down right between the man's eyes.

Doberman Berke, a morgue attendant of intermediate stature, humbled through life in constant awe of the ubiquitous Anton Hejar. Where death stalked, there, too, walked Anton Hejar, hat pulled low, hand on stamp.

Berke paused in his work to examine the insignia between the corpse's eyes. It was not elaborate, a mere functional circle with script around the outer edging and the characters 'A.H.' tangled in some written state of intercourse at centre.

'Item and contents property of ... ' read the circumferential legend if one cared to crane one's neck and bend kiss-close to the poor dead face to see.

Berke did no such thing, nor had he ever done so. He knew Hejar's function, knew the language of the snatchers from careful study. Instead, with a curiosity he compared the time on Hejar's stamp — 14:34 — with the report that accompanied the cadaver. The ambulance men had put the time of extinction at 14:34.5. Hejar's professionalism was uncanny.

He detached the item and placed it in a refrigerated container. Then he pushed it to one-side to await collection.

Invariably, Hejar came himself. If he had any juniors, Berke had never seen them. Certainly, they never came to claim their master's bloody bounties. Hejar knew Berke's routine. He had already checked the attendant's volume of work. He would be here very shortly.

And even as Berke acknowledged the fact, the door swung wide and Hejar was walking towards him, smiling and beneficent, unfolding a spotless receipt.

Berke took the receipt and examined it closely, though he knew full well it would contain adequate authority from Coroner Gurgin. Dealing with Hejar, an expert in his own field, Berke endeavored to appear as painstaking and conscientious as Hejar's patience would allow. And Hejar had a fund of patience. Hejar had so much patience he should have had a long face and a penchant for squatting on desert cactus plants to go with it. Instead, he just smiled ... and in that smile lay a chill warning that if you didn't move fast enough to prove you were alive, then Anton Hejar would take you for dead.

Berke handed back the receipt. "Any trouble this time? Sometimes sector centre gets a little old-fashioned about dispatchment at speed. Like sympathy for the dependents."

"Sympathy is out of date," said Hejar blandly. "Absurd sentimentality about a piece of stiffening flesh." He showed his teeth again, setting up laughter wrinkles around his blue, blue eyes. "Burgin

knows where his steroids come from. He gives me no complications. A little blind-eye money for his favourite dream pill and he is always prepared to write me a rapid registration marker. Now, is this mine?"

He moved towards the container and identified his designation, humming busily to himself. He caught up the container by its handle and started for the door.

"Wait."

"Why?" Hejar spat out the word with a venom that made Berke writhe, but his face, all the while, was mild, his manner charitable. "Why," he said, more reasonably.

Hejar was no stranger. They met elsewhere and often and dialogue came far more easily where surroundings were no more indicative of the one's vocation than the other's.

Berke felt foolish. There were always questions that occurred to him moments before Hejar's arrival at the morgue and each time, he lined them up and rehearsed a conversation which, he hoped, would impress Hejar with its depth and insight.

But when Hejar came, it was as though he dragged the careful script out of Berke's head and bundled it into a corner. Berke was tongue-tied. Hejar, as ever, was sunny. Today was no exception.

"Why?" Hejar asked again, patiently.

Berke stumbled. "Isn't ... isn't there anything else you want? The trunk isn't spoken for."

"No wonder."

"I'm not with you."

"The man has been struck by a car," said Hejar with exaggerated diction. He might have talked thus to a retarded child — if he had ever spared a little of his surface warmth for a creature who could do him no good. "Digestive chemistry, kidney system, circulation ... they're all finished. At most, there may be a dozen organs worth salvaging, and we don't have time for that. Besides, our clients pay more money for bits and pieces."

"Uh-huh." Berke slotted away the piece of business acumen. Sooner or later, he would have to take his chance on the outside — he was fast running out of apprenticeships. And he was determined to sample the lush pastures of the thoroughfare section, with its easy pickings and its first-come-first-served credo. There was small reward, by comparison, in industrial accidents or domestic mishaps.

"Now," said Hejar, "is there anything else?" He made it sound like a polite inquiry, but Berke knew that he delayed the man further at his peril. He didn't want to leave his room one morning and find Hejar waiting to follow him. He shifted from one foot to another.

"Oh, yes. Forgive me." Hejar reached in his pocket and tossed a handful of notes across to Berke. They fluttered on to the separation

table. In the time it took Berke to wipe them clean of tell-tale stains, Hejar was gone.

Jolo Trevnik locked the weathered door of his downtown Adonis League and wondered, as he wondered every night, why he tried to carry on. Once, his culture clinic had been definitely uptown and well filled with rounded young men who slung medicine balls at each other and tested their biceps in crucifix poses on the wall-bars.

Ironic how, when you had survived everything else from social stigma to national laziness, finally location turned against you. The people had moved away into apartment blocks on the town periphery, leaving the centre purely for business and only that which was conducted in skyscraper settings.

These days, Trevnik exercised alone, moving slowly from one piece of apparatus to another, not because he had himself slowed up, but because now only time hung heavily on the wall-bars.

His suit grew progressively shabbier and his fortune, body-built in the days of blind, rootless activity that followed the tobacco ban, grew correspondingly smaller. As did his steaks and his health food orders. He was still in fine shape ... and frustrated as only a man can be whose sole talent has become redundant.

He turned away from the door and walked towards the main rotor quay. A shadow in a doorway down the street moved to follow him.

Hejar had made only a token attempt at concealment and Trevnik knew of his presence. It was part of the new fatal system that had emptied Trevnik's clinic and all others around the town, and all football grounds and all places where excitement or over-exertion might bring unexpected eclipse. The body that had once been so envied in life was now attractive only in terms of death.

I guess I ought to be honoured, Trevnik thought. But I feel like a cat in heat. I'll make the pink punk work for his money.

At the rotor quay, he selected the slow track, and moved quickly along it. He wanted to put the idlers in his pursuer's way and they made no protest, silent, turned inward with the sea-shells in their ears filling their minds with hypnotic rhythms and whispered words.

Above the whine of the rotor and the passing traffic, he heard the man stumbling after him, heard him cursing, and laughed.

At the next junction, he transferred to a faster track, still walking rapidly, weaving neatly between the younger mutes, with their frondular arms and snapping fingers.

Hejar was less adept and less gentle. Once, he jostled a young man so violently that his earpiece slipped to the moving pavement.

The youth recovered it and pursued the pursuer long enough to

tap his heels and send him headlong before returning to his reverie.

Trevnik heard the resultant tumble and allowed the pavement to bear him along until the dishevelled Hejar regained his feet. Then he back-pedalled until the man drew level, still dusting himself down. He raised the pitch of his voice a deceptive shade.

"I hope you didn't hurt yourself," he said, fussily ... too fussily. "Perhaps we should walk a little more slowly."

Hejar eyed him warily. "I'm quite recovered now," he said. "Thanks for your concern."

If the guy knows why I trail him, he wondered, why doesn't he show it? Why this spectacular concern?

"Perhaps I should walk with you in case you feel suddenly faint," said Trevnik. "If you're shaky, you ought to get to bed. Are you sure I can't help you?"

The attitude jarred on Hejar's sensitivity. He began to notice other things about the man. How he moved — almost mincingly. The breeze that played on their faces as they were drawn along the track brought a musky aroma to the nostrils grown acute with death. Hejar swallowed and looked at the man again.

"Really," he said, almost defensively. "It's all right. The next quay is as far as I go."

"As you please," said Trevnik. His lips tightened with a hint of petulance. "But if there's the smallest thing ... "

"Nothing," said Hejar, savagely.

Trevnik rode beside him, barely glancing at him but carrying the smug conviction of a man who has done a good turn only to meet an ungracious response.

Smug? Hejar, sneaking glances at Trevnik from the shelter of his hat-brim, became even more apprehensive.

Trevnik's finely developed limbs and torso were bound to fetch a good price. Or were they? Trying to sell internal organs marred by chromosomatic complications or a brain whose motivations were neither particularly masculine nor blatantly feminine but in some twilight in-between ... that had definite set-backs.

At the quay closest to his office, he disembarked. "Thanks for everything," he said.

"I hope we meet again," said Trevnik. He waved until the rotor bore him out of sight.

There was no doubt Trevnik had a physique rarely seen among the squat inhabitants of 1983; a body which, if properly marketed, could still prove profitable despite ...

Hejar chewed his sensual lower lip. Despite nothing. He had kept observation for weeks now, at first unnoticed and lately unheeded. In the beginning there had been no such doubts proffered. It was just

today? Hejar could not be sure that the disturbing traits had not been there for some time. Certainly, they had not been apparent when he began his vigils. And that was it — a device, dated from the time Trevnik first noticed that the snatchers were on to him, or at least some time subsequent to that ... when he thought of it.

Hejar felt better. The fall had shaken him, had made his heart pound alarmingly. But now he had rumbled the man, his good spirits returned.

Any fresh measures to protect the remains after death intrigued him. There was, after all, no pain, no occupancy and postmortem activities were unlikely to disturb the main participant. But the sanctimonious sproutings of the sixties and early seventies still persisted though even the government had officially classed them out of date. There remained in certain circles a horror of disturbing the corpse. Hejar had long ago shouldered and forgotten the inferences of obscenity and laughed all the way to the credit pile when somebody called him a ghoul, a cannibal, a necrophile.

"I do mankind a service," he would tell people who questioned his motives. "The burial grounds have been used up, built over, defiled in asphalt. The crematorium has a use, but it is a great leveller. How do you identify ashes? Items that could be vital to the living are wasted in the flames. Far better, is it not, to have a scroll stating that even in death, your dearest are unselfishly helping those who continue to suffer. I aid medical science. I am trained to the task and my spirit is right."

"If I can help somebody," he crooned raggedly as he entered the block where his office was situated, "as I pass along ... "

He boarded the elevator and pressed the button for the 11th floor.

"Then my living shall not be in vain ... "

The elevator wound upwards. Head bowed, Hejar was engrossed in the half-remembered song.

"Then my living shall not be in vain ... Oh ... "

The elevator shunted him into the nth floor berth. He opened the door of his office.

"My living shall not be in va-a-i-i-n-n-n ... "

The woman in the guest chair had red-rimmed eyes but she watched him intensely.

"Good evening," he said calmly. He was used to finding such women in his office. One pair of red eyes looked much like another.

"I've been here for hours," she said.

"I didn't know you were waiting," he said, obviously. He did not concede the necessity for an apology. Instead, he smiled.

"You are ... Mr Hejar, the ... reclamation ... man?" Hejar's smile had disconcerted her, as it had been meant to do. The smile therefore

broadened.

"I've been sitting here, looking at your ... pictures," she said, gesturing vaguely at the Ben Maile skyline and the Constable pastoral. "They're not ... what I ... would have expected."

Hejar hung his hat and coat carefully on the old-fashioned stand. He took his seat behind the desk and built a cathedral nave with his fingers while the smile lay dozing on his face.

It was always best to let them talk — as much as they wanted to, about whatever they wanted to. Gradually they would work their way round to the inevitable plea.

"What had you expected, Mrs ... " He deliberately left the sentence hanging in the air.

"An office without a single rounded edge. No softness anywhere ... everything sharp and cold and soulless."

She would tell him her name and the reason for her presence in her own time. He would not prompt the revelation because it was important to maintain a singular lack of interest.

"I think pictures add another dimension to an office," he said "Constable had a way with water, an eye for minute detail. I often think he sketched every leaf. Maile, now ... "

"You're probably wondering why I am here," said the woman. She was fortyish, plump, not unbecoming. She was in pain, with her loss, with the alien circumstances in which she now found herself.

"Take your time. I know how it is ... "

"I'm Elsie Stogumber."

Stogumber. Hejar switched on the audiostat which unscrambled the data from the long-winded secretary computer.

"Stogumber," he said into the feeder piece.

"There would hardly be anything recorded yet," said the woman.

"Today?"

The woman twisted her gloves in her lap.

"He asked for you," said Hejar.

"Small comfort to me now." The woman seemed mesmerised by the anguished play of finger and nylon. Hejar waited.

"They say you — you had his head."

"That's right."

The woman watched his face for perhaps five seconds. Then she went back to her glove play.

"You wouldn't still have it?"

Hejar's stomach churned. His vocation was bloody enough, even viewed with the detachment he brought to it, but ...

"Why?" he asked. The smile had gone.

"I suddenly couldn't remember my husband's face. It terrified me. If I could just ... "

"I no longer have it. My clients demand prompt delivery."

"Your — clients?"

"Come now, Mrs. Stogumber. I'm sure you realise the complete situation. You already know exactly what came to me. You also know why and that I am only an agent in this ... "

She screamed once, sharply. But her face was unfrenzied. It seemed impossible that such a sound had uttered from her.

"Who has it now, then?" she asked. Her voice was controlled, but only just. "Who has it?"

"My dear Mrs. Stogumber ... " Hejar found another smile and slipped it on. "Will you not be satisfied if I say that your husband is beyond any inconvenience or pain and that his last thoughts, to my certain knowledge, were of you?"

"No. It is not enough."

"What would you want, Mrs. Stogumber?"

"Ideally, my husband. Or at least, some part of him."

"But he's **dead**, Mrs. Stogumber. He's gone. He is nothing without the spark of life. Why prolong the parting? Why mess up your pretty dress, Mrs. Stogumber?"

The woman crumpled visibly in the chair. Her shoulders shook and she took in great gulps of air.

"Don't you have any movies of him? No threedees, maybe?"

"He went out after breakfast and I'll never see him again. You — you buzzards chop him up before I can even ... identify him."

The fight for breath became less laboured as tears began to flow. Hejar let her cry, thankful for an escape valve. He wondered what he could say when she came out of it. Evening edged a little closer to night. Her sobs softened to an occasional sniff. She blew her nose and then looked up.

"It usually helps if I explain," began Hejar. "You see, when in 1973, the Central Committee rescinded the Anatomy Act of 1823 and the Burial Act of 1926 ... "

"I've seen you," she said. "All of you. Waiting at busy road junctions, chasing ambulances, trailing feeble old men ... "

Her voice was close to hysteria. He rose, walked round the desk and slapped her hard. She fell silent.

"You might feel different if you understood our mission," he said. "We are not buzzards. We play a vital role. To benefit the living, we make certain adjustments to the dead. Nobody suffers by it. The Salvage of Organs Act of January, 1974, gave us the full power of the legislature. This was tantamount to a declaration that the racket in kidneys and heart valves and limbs that had thrived up to that time was accepted as inevitable and made conventional. We have new thinkers now. Wasting precious sentiment on a pile of gone-off meat

was not progressive. Surely you can see that."

The woman took a deep breath. For a moment she teetered on the verge of more weeping. Then she struggled on.

"I accept it in theory," she said. "It seemed to make good sense at the time. Things like that always do when you are not involved ... But I've seen the way you work. You salvage men don't just wait for death — you prompt it. Surely, if you are the public servants you say you are, you shouldn't have to compete with each other."

Hejar swung his feet up on to the desk. Now the situation had resumed a calmer plane, he could pick and choose his words. He clasped his fingers behind his head.

"Now there, admirable Mrs. Stogumber, you have hit upon our problem. This is a living as much as a vocation. I must play as others shape the game. If there is a certain — over-enthusiasm, it is not of my choosing. But I have to absorb it if I am to continue in the practice. As long as there are people who deplore this trend, there is a chance that it will be thrown out. You see, there are so many new people trying to make out. As yet, we have no control over membership. The dignity that once went with this calling ... the pathological training ... Well, you know how it is. You open a door and all manner of undesirables flock through it."

"I'm sorry," she said. "For acting like that, I mean. It was childish of me." She pried a wintry smile.

"I am sorry, too, Mrs. Stogumber, for having to resort to such extreme measures. Your present composure impresses me considerably. Perhaps you find the situation a little easier to accept now."

She smiled again, a little more like autumn now.

"When somebody takes the trouble to explain, it helps," she said.

"The 1974 amendments to the Human Tissues Act of 1961 ... " said Hejar. She stopped him with a raised hand. "Now Mr. Hejar. I fear you are trying to blind me with science."

High summer shaped her lips. Hejar swung his feet off the desk, stood up and came round towards her. "Not at all, my dear lady ... "

But Elsie Stogumber was clear of her chair and through the office door before he could reach her. Her summer was not for Anton Hejar.

Hejar stood on the permanent walkway opposite the gymnasium and made no attempt at concealment. Such intrigue became ludicrous with repetition, particularly when all parties were aware of the charade that was being played out. Now, he did not veil his intentions even out of courtesy.

He was too little of the hypocrite, he told himself, but even in that, he lied. He stood so because he liked to watch Trevnik's dark

face as the man noticed him, to see the nostrils flare and the eyes go suddenly wild as if in fear of an old superstition, and then just as suddenly narrow and normal and carefully-averted.

He heard a descending thunder on the stairs. Trevnik must have seen him, given the advantage of darkness looking out on light, because he simply showed his back as he locked the door and started down the street.

In no apparent hurry, Hejar crossed the road and fell into step about twenty yards behind the giant. Today, he saw nothing suspect in the man's gait. Trevnik, presumably, had given up any pretense and walked now only in a way that exhibited the disciplined thrust of hip and leg.

Elsie Stogumber, cramped from her unaccustomed sojourn in the narrow doorway once occupied by Hejar, emerged into the mid-day brilliance and watched the two men down the street.

Berke took a final wheat-germ sandwich and pushed the remaining pile along the bench to Hejar.

Though he had long since ceased to be troubled by his occupation, his appetite had never returned. Each day he prepared more sandwiches than he would eat.

And each day, still feigning surprise at the meeting and hungry from his hunt, plump Hejar joined him on his bench at the leisure zone and waited politely until Berke had shown himself fed to sufficiency and offered him the surplus.

Berke washed his mouth out at the nearby drinking fountain, spat and sat down again.

Hejar chewed, his attention riveted to the children's fun-run, watching for a collision with the spinning chairs or a fall from the helter-skelter.

"We could, perhaps, fill in the loop-holes," said Berke. Hejar grunted.

"The way into this game is too easy," said Berke. "If we study, it is to be eventually better at our job. There is no ruling. It is a labour of love. Amateurs, opportunists can always make inroads. Perhaps we should form a union, or get some recognition from the Central Committee."

Hejar shrugged. He was uninterested in Berke's theorising, his verbal attempts — in his incompetence — to make the living more secure for himself.

"The amount of money the amateurs make, the volume of business we professionals lose is negligible," he said. "What do they get? A relation dies at home. Natural causes. Who pays for natural causes? The bodies are worn out, anyhow. A murder victim is

discovered on a rubbish dump in an advanced state of decay. Where's the money in that? No, myself I don't mind who gets the stamp. I can always keep myself well."

In his sudden silence, he indicated his doubt of the other's ability.

"Me, too," said Berke hurriedly. "I was thinking of the less fortunate members of our calling."

Atop the fifty foot slide, a jostled child screamed and clutched with vain fingers at the air. Berke and Hejar moved at speed towards the gathering crowd.

The Minerva no longer pretended that the health foods it served were any more than politely-fashioned simulants or, at best, salvaged from some overgrown delicatessen. But at least the café still retained certain of the musty odours that had once given herb stores an impression of geography contained within three walls and a display window.

Jolo Trevnik avoided the glassed-up, crowded planktonia. His stomach, accustomed to a balanced carbohydrate intake, turned on the lead oxide that came with every boxed cereal these days, a legacy of the brightly-painted free gift needed to sell any competitive product.

His system revolted against battery lamb and the beef and chicken, he knew, contained sterilising agents. Not that he was bothered particularly about potency. The unborn were the lucky ones, he reasoned.

A shape above his table cut out the light. Momentarily, he started, his mind still fixed on the snatcher with the Santa Claus face.

Then the woman sat down opposite him and he noted the carefully-highlighted features and the overbright eyes with a measure of relief.

He took a sip at his acorn coffee to steady his nerves. When he put his cup down, she said, "Mr. Trevnik?"

He nodded.

"I saw the name on the door of your gymnasium."

"But that's a long way away. What ... ?"

"I followed you," she said quickly. "I couldn't help noticing I wasn't the only one."

Trevnik dropped his eyes and considered the gray coffee. He felt — unclean; a curiosity, a freak. All the more for having someone else notice his humiliation.

"I'm sorry for you," she said, and that made it worse.

"You don't need to be sorry, lady," he said, almost angrily. "It doesn't bother me. I look after myself. I avoid accidents."

"My husband was the same."

"Should I know your husband?"

"I think he came to your clinic a few times — Harry Stogumber."

"Stogumber."

His echo of the word chilled her with a memory.

"Tall man," he said. "Not too fat. Not much meat on him at all, really ... "

"Please." The woman laid her gloved hand across his fingers.

"I'm sorry," said Trevnik. "Did I say something ... ?"

"A phrase. It has associations ... "

Trevnik went over it in his mind. " 'Not much ... ' " He bit his lip. "I am beginning to understand," he said. "I didn't realise. Forgive me, ma'am. Maybe I should ... "

Trevnik freed his great legs from the meager table and turned his seat at an angle to allow them access to the gangway.

"I hope you're not going," the woman said. "Please don't go."

Elsie Stogumber was running her eyes over the breadth of his shoulders, the width and density of his hands. The frankness of her inspection began to embarrass him. "I was going to ask you a favour," she said finally. "That man who keeps following you. He was there when the car hit my husband. He ... " She swallowed hard.

"Don't trouble yourself," said Trevnik. "I can work out what happened."

"I want to hurt him," she said. "Really physically hurt him. But what can I do?"

Trevnik looked down at his hands, saw how the tendons moved under the skin.

"So you want me to hurt him for you ... Do you know that I have never in my life used my strength to hurt anyone?"

"I could offer you money," she said. He looked up angrily. "But I won't. I can see that you would do it only if you wanted to do it."

"Lady, that man is only waiting for me to die so he can tear me apart. I **want** to do it **now**."

"Then what is stopping you?"

Trevnik clasped his hands to stop them from moving of their own accord. He rested his chin on them.

"It is against the law," he said.

"What law? What human law could possibly deny that I have a right to hurt that man?"

"You, maybe. Not me."

"You could plead self-defence ... if you said he tried to push you into the road or trip you into the rotor plant, you would have provocation."

"Lady ... Mrs. Stogumber, ma'am. How could I plead self-defence. I mean ... I mean ... look at me. I **look** like an attacker. I **want** to help

you, Mrs. Stogumber, but ... "

"It's all right," said Elsie Stogumber. "I'll find somebody else."

Trevnik found himself on his feet. The woman said no more. All she wanted was for him to stand still while his thoughts progressed. She allowed perhaps 15 seconds to pass while Trevnik hesitated, towering above her. "Of course, they wouldn't have to **kill** him," she said quietly.

"Maybe if I ... " Trevnik sat down again. "Maybe if I told them how he'd been following me and all and ... and ... taunting me, they'd understand."

Elsie Stogumber let him talk on, convincing himself, committing himself.

"I am sure nobody on earth would blame you," she said eventually. "He is trying to — well, interfere — with you. That's almost an offence in itself."

Trevnik smiled happily for the first time in a long while. "You're right, Mrs. Stogumber," he said. "You're sure as hell right."

Again the plump man waiting on the far pavement; again the thunder down the rotting wooden stairs. Jolo Trevnik emerged and turned to lock the door. Hejar shifted his weight from one foot to another, anxious to be away.

Trevnik turned from the door and looked straight at Hejar. Then he started across the road. Hejar was suddenly afraid. He sought desperately for another purpose to give to his presence.

"That building," he said before Trevnik could reach him. "Doesn't look too safe. It could fall down any time."

"Is that why you keep following me?" Trevnik mounted the curb. "Because you're afraid I'll go down with it? I'm not much use to you crushed, am I?"

"No ... no. We — my department — we wanted to find out where you live, where you eat, your transportive habits, so we can site your replacement office accordingly ... "

"Rubbish," said Trevnik.

"No, I assure you ... "

Trevnik hit him first on the nose, drawing blood. "See a little of your own," he said pleasantly.

Then he sank his right fist deep into Hejar's solar plexus and followed it with his left. He began to enjoy the way the stout man yielded and swayed before him; the way the flesh gave beneath his knuckles.

He began a methodical destruction, aware that he was going beyond his brief, but somehow no longer able to call back his massive fists.

He chopped down on the nerve centres inside Hejar's collarbones.

"Grave-robber," he said without expression. "My, how you little pink people love to get blood on your hands."

He hit Hejar twice more in the stomach, and the man was there, jack-knifed in front of him.

His knees spoke to him. Use us. Smash him. But he controlled them. If he used anything but his fists in this, it would no longer be fair, would no longer carry a justification.

Hejar folded slowly to the ground. Trevnik's feet spoke. Let us finish him. Please.

"No," Trevnik shouted. He turned Hejar face upwards then, and with tears streaming down his face, he walked away.

Hejar, his senses reeling, his mouth salty and crowded, saw roofs tipping at him and tried to twist out of their downward path. But he could not move.

A shadow lingered above him. His flooded nostrils barely caught a woman's scent before a smell he knew only too well, a smell of ancient perspiration.

The woman pushed back his damp hair and then seemed to be going through his pockets.

Hejar closed his eyes. Get on with it, he thought through a blood-red mist. Take my wallet and go.

The woman spoke. "Mr. Hejar." The voice had a familiarity but it defied identification as the torrents of imbalance raged against his ear-drums.

He opened his eyes. The woman bent towards him. Something glinted in her hand.

He tried to scream but choked on his own blood, his own overpowering smell.

"A widow has to make a living somehow," said Elsie Stogumber. Then she brought the stamp down right between his eyes.

The astonishing prospect (as I write — half an election year before publication, remember) is that the worst might not *happen. The flashes of light on several (new and old) horizons are just frequent enough to give an illusion, at leasts of predawn.*

One streak of illumination was a collaboration between two astronomers making an excellent case for the existence of Intelligent Life in the Universe *(Holden Day, 1966) — or at least on Earth. The book is knowledgeable, imaginative, literate, entertaining, instructive and also (doubly) opinionated. In the preface, Carl Sagan, of Harvard and the Smithsonian, says of his colleague I. S. Shklovskii, of the Sternberg Institute and Soviet Academy:*

... Since he does not travel out of the Soviet Union and I have never

traveled to the Soviet Union, we have been unable to discuss the present edition in person. "The probability of our meeting is unlikely to be smaller than the probability of a visit to the Earth by an Extra-terrestrial cosmonaut," he once wrote ... As the reader might expect ... there are occasional differences. I have not tried to avoid these problems ... I do not think the reader will be distressed by the occasional appearance of a dialogue.

What with Alliluyeva and Glassboro, too, the Soviet-American dialogue gets steadily more sociable, if not more sensible. Even the Orange (Yellow/Red) Menace looms less lurid in the light of popular dissatisfaction, dissent, and spasmodic riot and rebellion, in the provinces of China as in the cities of America. And then there was The Report from Iron Mountain on the Possibility and Desirability of Peace *(Dial, 1967).*

1967 was a big year all around for reports and most of those not concerned with Vietnam or the Kennedy assassination seemed to concentrate on the year 2000 (perhaps the influence of RAND's 'Delphi' predictions; or the — again — imminent release of the Clarke-Kubrick film 2001*?), including the extraordinary (February 1967) '2001+' issue of* Architectural Design. *Along with broad forecasts and detailed technical prospectuses, it reprinted a speech on 'The Year 2006' by Buckminster Fuller:*

... In ten years from now we will have changed so completely that no one will say you have to demonstrate your right to live, that you have to earn a living ... It will be normal for a man to be successful ... Politics will become obsolete. ...

There will be a rediscovery of what Einstein described in 1930, in an article on the 'cosmic religious sense' ... We are going to have an increasing number of human beings as scientists and philosophers thinking about the total significance of human experience and ... of man's development. An era of extraordinary integrity might ensue.

The 'cosmic religious sense' and the integrity potential of man are the dominant themes of the most readably provocative theological s-f since A Canticle for Leibowitz *— R. A. Lafferty's first novel,* The Past Master *(Ace, 1968). Here he offers a report on scientists and philosophers and the PTA and things.*

The Primary Education of the Camiroi
R. A. Lafferty

ABSTRACT FROM JOINT REPORT TO THE GENERAL DUBUQUE PTA CONCERNING THE PRIMARY EDUCATION OF THE CAMIROI, Subtitled Critical Observations of a Parallel Culture on a Neighbouring World, and Evaluations of THE OTHER WAY OF EDUCATION.

Extract from the Day Book:

"Where," we asked the Information Factor at Camiroi City Terminal, "is the office of the local PTA?"

"Isn't any," he said cheerfully.

"You mean that in Camiroi City, the metropolis of the planet, there is no PTA?" our chairman Paul Piper asked with disbelief.

"Isn't any office of it. But you're poor strangers, so you deserve an answer even if you can't frame your questions properly. See that elderly man sitting on the bench and enjoying the sun? Go tell him you need a PTA. He'll make you one."

"Perhaps the initials convey a different meaning on Camiroi," said Miss Munch the first surrogate chairman. "By them we mean — "

"Parent Teachers Apparatus, of course. Colloquial English is one of the six Earthian languages required here, you know. Don't be abashed. He's a fine person, and he enjoys doing things for strangers. He'll be glad to make you a PTA."

We were nonplussed, but we walked over to the man indicated.

"We are looking for the local PTA, sir," said Miss Smice, our second surrogate chairman. "We were told that you might help us."

"Oh, certainly," said the elderly Camiroi gentleman. "One of you arrest that man walking there, and we'll get started with it."

"Do what?" asked our Mr. Piper.

"Arrest him. I have noticed that your own words sometimes do not convey a meaning to you. I often wonder how you do communicate among yourselves. Arrest, take into custody, seize by any force physical or moral, and bring him here."

"Yes, *sir*," cried Miss Hanks our third surrogate chairman. She enjoyed things like this. She arrested the walking Camiroi man with force partly physical and partly moral and brought him to the group.

"It's a PTA they want, Meander," the elder Camiroi said to the one arrested. "Grab three more, and we'll get started. Let the lady help. She's good at it."

Our Miss Hanks and the Camiroi man named Meander arrested three other Camiroi men and brought them to the group.

"Five. It's enough," said the elderly Camiroi. "We are hereby constituted a PTA and ordered into random action. Now, how can we accommodate you, good Earth people?"

"But are you legal? Are you five persons competent to be a PTA?" demanded our Mr. Piper.

"Any Camiroi citizen is competent to do any job on the planet of Camiroi," said one of the Camiroi men (we learned later that his name was Talarium). "Otherwise Camiroi would be in a sad shape."

"It may be," said our Miss Smice sourly ... "It all seems very informal. What if one of you had to be World President?"

"The odds are that it won't come to one man in ten," said the elderly Camiroi (his name was Philoxenus). "I'm the only one of this group ever to serve as president of this planet, and it was a pleasant week I spent in the Office. Now to the point. How can we accommodate you?"

"We would like to see one of your schools in session," said our Mr. Piper. "We would like to talk to the teachers and the students. We are here to compare the two systems of education."

"There is no comparison," said old Philoxenus, " — meaning no offense. Or no more than a little. On Camiroi, we practice Education. On Earth, they play a game, but they call it by the same name. That makes the confusion. Come. We'll go to a school in session."

"And to a public school," said Miss Smice suspiciously. "Do not fob off any fancy private school on us as typical."

"That would be difficult," said Philoxenus. "There is no public school in Camiroi City and only two remaining on the Planet. Only a small fraction of one per cent of the students of Camiroi are in public schools. We maintain that there is no more reason for the majority of children to be educated in a public school than to be raised in a public orphanage. We realise, of course, that on Earth you have made a sacred buffalo of the public school."

"Sacred cow," said our Mr. Piper.

"Children and Earthlings should be corrected when they use words wrongly," said Philoxenus. "How else will they learn the correct forms? The animal held sacred in your own near orient was of the species *bos bubalus* rather than *bos bos,* a buffalo rather than a cow. Shall we go to a school?"

"If it cannot be a public school, at least let it be a typical school," said Miss Smice.

"That again is impossible," said Philoxenus. "Every school on Camiroi is in some respect atypical."

We went to visit an atypical school.

Incident: Our first contact with the Camiroi students was a

violent one. One of them, a lively little boy about eight years old, ran into Miss Munch, knocked her down, and broke her glasses. Then he jabbered something in an unknown tongue.

"Is that Camiroi?" asked Mr. Piper with interest. "From what I have heard, I supposed the language to have a harsher and fuller sound."

"You mean you don't recognise it?" asked Philoxenus with amusement. "What a droll admission from an educator. The boy is very young and very ignorant. Seeing that you were Earthians, he spoke in Hindi, which is the tongue used by more Earthians than any other. No, no, Xypete, they are of the minority who speak English. You can tell it by their colourless texture and the narrow heads on them."

"I say you sure do have slow reaction, lady," the little boy Xypete explained. "Even subhumans should react faster than that. You just stand there and gape and let me bowl you over. You want me analyse you and see why you react so slow?"

"No! No!"

"You seem unhurt in structure from the fall," the little boy continued, "but if I hurt you I got to fix you. Just strip down to your shift, and I'll go over you and make sure you're all right."

"No! No! No!"

"It's all right," said Philoxenus. "All Camiroi children learn primary medicine in the first grade, setting bones and healing contusions and such."

"No! No! I'm all right. But he's broken my glasses."

"Come along Earthside lady, I'll make you some others," said the little boy. "With your slow reaction time you sure can't afford the added handicap of defective vision. Shall I fit you with contacts?"

"No. I want glasses just like those which were broken. Oh heavens, what will I do?"

"You come, I do," said the little boy. It was rather revealing to us that the little boy was able to test Miss Munch's eyes, grind lenses, make frames and have her fixed up within three minutes. "I have made some improvements over those you wore before," the boy said, "to help compensate for your slow reaction time."

"Are all the Camiroi students so talented?" Mr. Piper asked. He was impressed.

"No. Xypete is unusual," Philoxenus said. "Most students would not be able to make a pair of glasses so quickly or competently till they were at least nine."

Random interviews:

"How rapidly do you read?" Miss Hanks asked a young girl.

"One hundred and twenty words a minute," the girl said.

"On Earth some of the girl students your age have learned to read at the rate of five hundred words a minute," Miss Hanks said proudly.

"When I began disciplined reading, I was reading at the rate of four thousands words a minute," the girl said. "They had quite a time correcting me of it. I had to take remedial reading, and my parents were ashamed of me. Now I've learned to read almost slow enough."

"I don't understand," said Miss Hanks.

"Do you know anything about Earth History or Geography?" Miss Smice asked a middle-sized boy.

"We sure are sketchy on it, lady. There isn't very much over there, is there?"

"Then you have never heard of Dubuque?"

"Count Dubuque interests me. I can't say as much for the City named after him. I always thought that the Count handled the matters of the conflicting French and Spanish land grants and the basic claims of the Sauk and Fox Indians very well. References to the Town now carry a humourous connotation, and 'School-Teacher from Dubuque' has become a folk archetype."

"Thank you," said Miss Smice, "or do I thank you?"

"What are you taught of the relative humanity of the Earthians and the Camiroi and of their origins?" Miss Munch asked a Camiroi girl.

"The other four worlds, Earth (Gaea), Kentauron Mikron, Dahae and Astrobe were all settled from Camiroi. That is what we are taught. We are also given the humourous aside that if it isn't true we will still hold it true till something better comes along. It was we who rediscovered the Four Worlds in historic time, not they who discovered us. If we did not make the original settlements, at least we have filed the first claim that we made them. We did, in historical time, make an additional colonisation of Earth. You call it the Incursion of the Dorian Greeks."

"Where are their playgrounds?" Miss Hanks asked Talarium.

"Oh, the whole world. The children have the run of everything. To set up specific playgrounds would be like setting a table-sized aquarium down in the depths of the ocean. It would really be pointless."

Conference:

The four of us from Earth, specifically from Dubuque, Iowa, were in discussion with the five members of the Camiroi PTA.

"How do you maintain discipline?" Mr. Piper asked.

"Indifferently," said Philoxenus. "Oh, you mean in detail. It varies. Sometimes we let it drift, sometimes we pull them up short. Once they have learned that they must comply to an extent, there is little trouble. Small children are often put down into a pit. They do not eat or come out till they know their assignment."

"But that is inhuman," said Miss Hanks.

"Of course. But small children are not yet entirely human. If a child has not learned to accept discipline by the third or fourth grade, he is hanged."

"Literally?" asked Miss Munch.

"How would you hang a child figuratively? And what effect would that have on the other children?"

"By the neck?" Miss Munch still was not satisfied.

"By the neck until they are dead. The other children always accept the example gracefully and do better. Hanging isn't employed often. Scarcely one child in a hundred is hanged."

"What is this business about slow reading?" Miss Hanks asked. "I don't understand it at all."

"Only the other day there was a child in the third grade who persisted in rapid reading." Philoxenus said. "He was given an object lesson. He was given a book of medium difficulty, and he read it rapidly. Then he had to put the book away and repeat what he had read. Do you know that in the first thirty pages he missed four words? Midway in the book there was a whole statement which he had understood wrongly, and there were hundreds of pages that he got word-perfect only with difficulty. If he was so unsure on material that he had just read, think how imperfectly he would have recalled it forty years later."

"You mean that the Camiroi children learn to recall everything that they read?"

"The Camiroi children and adults will recall for life every detail they have ever seen, read or heard. We on Camiroi are only a little more intelligent than you on Earth. We cannot afford to waste time in forgetting or reviewing, or in pursuing anything of a shallowness that lends itself to scanning."

"Ah, would you call your schools liberal?" Mr. Piper asked.

"I would. You wouldn't," said Philoxenus. "We do not on Camiroi, as you do on Earth, use words to mean their opposites. There is nothing in our education or on our world that corresponds to the quaint servility which you call liberal on Earth."

"Well, would you call your education progressive?"

"No. In your argot, progressive, of course, means infantile."

"How are the schools financed?" asked Mr. Piper.

"Oh, the voluntary tithe on Camiroi takes care of everything,

government, religion, education, public works. We don't believe in taxes, of course, and we never maintain a high overhead in anything."

"Just how voluntary is the tithing?" asked Miss Hanks. "Do you sometimes hang those who do not tithe voluntarily?"

"I believe there have been a few cases of that sort," said Philoxenus.

"And is your government really as slipshod as your education?" Mr. Piper asked. "Are your high officials really chosen by lot and for short periods?"

"Oh yes. Can you imagine a person so sick that he would actually *desire* to hold high office for any great period of time? Are there any further questions?"

"There must be hundreds," said Mr. Piper. "But we find difficulty putting them into words."

"If you cannot find words for them, we cannot find answers. PTA disbanded."

Conclusions:

A. The Camiroi system of education is inferior to our own in organisation, in buildings, in facilities, in playgrounds, in teacher conferences, in funding, in parental involvement, in supervision, in in-group out-group accommodation adjustment motifs. Some of the school buildings are grotesque. We asked about one particular building which seemed to us to be flamboyant and in bad taste. "What do you expect from second-grade children?" they said, "It is well built even if of peculiar appearance. Second-grade children are not yet complete artists of design."

"You mean that the children designed it themselves?" we asked.

"Of course," they said. "Designed and built it. It isn't a bad job for children."

Such a thing wouldn't be permitted on Earth.

B. The Camiroi system of education somehow produces much better results than does the education system of Earth. We have been forced to admit this by the evidence at hand.

C. There is an anomaly as yet unresolved between CONCLUSION A and CONCLUSION B.

APPENDIX TO JOINT REPORT

We give here, as perhaps of some interest, the curriculum of the Camiroi Primary Education.

FIRST YEAR COURSE:

Playing one wind instrument.

Simple drawing of objects and numbers.

Singing. (This is important. Many Earth people sing who cannot

sing. This early instruction of the Camiroi prevents that occurrence.)

Simple arithmetic, hand and machine.

First acrobatics.

First riddles and logic.

Mnemonic religion.

First dancing.

Walking the low wire.

Simple electric circuits.

Raising ants. (Eoempts, not earth ants.)

SECOND YEAR COURSE:

Playing one keyboard instrument.

Drawing, faces, letters, motions.

Singing comedies.

Complex arithmetic, hand and machine.

Second acrobatics.

First jokes and logic.

Quadratic religion.

Second dancing.

Simple defamation. (Spirited attacks on the character of one fellow student, with elementary falsification and simple hatchet-job programming.)

Performing on the medium wire.

Project electric wiring.

Raising bees. (Galelea, not earth bees.)

THIRD YEAR COURSE:

Playing one stringed instrument.

Reading and voice. (It is here that the student who may have fallen into bad habits of rapid reading is compelled to read at voice speed only.)

Soft stone sculpture.

Situation comedy.

Simple algebra, hand and machine.

First gymnastics.

Second jokes and logic.

Transcendent religion.

Complex acrobatic dancing.

Complex defamation.

Performing on the high wire and the sky pole.

Simple radio construction.

Raising, breeding and dissecting frogs. (Karakoli, not earth frogs.)

FOURTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, basic and geological.

Decadent comedy.

Simple geometry and trigonometry, hand and machine.

Track and field.
Shaggy people jokes and hirsute logic.
Simple obscenity.
Simple mysticism.
Patterns of falsification.
Trapeze work.
Intermediate electronics.
Human dissection.

FIFTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, technological.
Introverted drama.
Complex geometries and analytics, hand and machine.
Track and field for fifth year record.
First wit and logic.
First alcoholic appreciation.
Complex mysticism.
Setting intellectual climates, defamation in three dimensions.
Simple oratory.
Complex trapeze work.
Inorganic chemistry.
Advanced electronics.
Advanced human dissection.
Fifth Year Thesis.

The child is now ten years old and is half through his primary schooling. He is an unfinished animal, but he has learned to learn.

SIXTH YEAR COURSE:

Re-emphasis on slow reading.
Simple prodigious memory.
History reading, Camiroi and galactic, economic.
Horsemanship (of the Patrushkoe, not the earth horse.)
Advanced lathe and machine work for art and utility.
Literature, passive.
Calculi, hand and machine pankration.
Advanced wit and logic.
Second alcoholic appreciation.
Differential religion.
First business ventures.
Complex oratory.

Building-scaling. (The buildings are higher and the gravity stronger than on Earth; this climbing of buildings like human flies calls out the ingenuity and daring of the Camiroi children.)

Nuclear physics and post-organic chemistry.
Simple pseudo-human assembly.

SEVENTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, cultural.
Advanced prodigious memory.
Vehicle operation and manufacture of simple vehicle.
Literature, active.
Astrognosy, prediction and programming.
Advanced pankration.
Spherical logic, hand and machine.
Advanced alcoholic appreciation.
Integral religion.
Bankruptcy and recovery in business.
Conmanship and trend creation.
Post-nuclear physics and universals.
Transcendental athletics endeavor.
Complex robotics and programming.

EIGHTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, seminal theory.
Consummate prodigious memory.
Manufacture of complex land and water vehicles.
Literature, compenduous and terminative. (Creative book-burning following the Camiroi thesis that nothing ordinary be allowed to survive.)
Cosmic theory, seminal.
Philosophy construction.
Complex hedonism.
Laser religion.
Conmanship, seminal.
Consolidation of simple genius status.
Post-robotic integration.

NINTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, future and contingent.
Category invention.
Manufacture of complex light-barrier vehicles.
Construction of simple asteroids and planets.
Matrix religion and logic.
Simple human immortality disciplines.
Consolidation of complex genius status.
First problems of post-consciousness humanity.
First essays in marriage and reproduction.

TENTH YEAR COURSE:

History construction, active.
Manufacture of ultra-light-barrier vehicles.
Panphilosophical clarifications.
Construction of viable planets.
Consolidation of simple sanctity status.

Charismatic humour and pentacosmic logic.

Hypogyroscopic economy.

Penentaglossia. (The perfection of the fifty languages that every educated Camiroi must know including six Earthian languages. Of course the child will already have colloquial mastery of most of these, but he will not yet have them in their full depth.)

Construction of complex societies.

World government. (A course of the same name is sometimes given in Earthian schools, but the course is not of the same content. In this course the Camiroi student will govern a world, though not one of the first aspect worlds, for a period of three or four months.)

Tenth year thesis.

COMMENTS ON CURRICULUM:

The child will now be fifteen years old and will have completed his primary education. In many ways he will be advanced beyond his Earth counterpart. Physically more sophisticated, the Camiroi child could kill with his hands an Earth-type tiger or a cape buffalo. An Earth child would perhaps be reluctant even to attempt such feats. The Camiroi boy (or girl) could replace any professional Earth athlete at any position of any game, and could surpass all existing Earth records. It is simply a question of finer poise, strength and speed, the result of adequate schooling.

As to the arts (on which Earthlings sometimes place emphasis) the Camiroi child could produce easy and unequaled masterpieces in any medium. More important, he will have learned the relative unimportance of such pastimes.

The Camiroi child will have failed in business once, at age ten, and have learned patience and perfection of objective by his failure. He will have acquired the techniques of falsification and conmanship. Thereafter he will not be easily deceived by any of the citizens of any of the worlds. The Camiroi child will have become a complex genius and a simple saint; the latter reduces the index of Camiroi crime to near zero. He will be married and settled in those early years of greatest enjoyment.

The child will have built, from materials found around any Camiroi house, a faster-than-light vehicle. He will have piloted it on a significant journey of his own plotting and programming. He will have built quasi-human robots of great intricacy. He will be of perfect memory and judgment and will be well prepared to accept solid learning.

He will have learned to use his whole mind, for the vast reservoirs which are the unconscious to us are not unconscious to him. Everything in him is ordered for use. And there seems to be no great

secret about the accomplishments, only to do everything slowly enough and in the right order: Thus they avoid repetition and drill which are the shriveling things which dull the quick apperception.

The Camiroi schedule is challenging to the children, but it is nowhere impossible or discouraging. Everything builds to what follows. For instance, the child is eleven years old before he is given post-nuclear physics and universals. Such subjects might be too difficult for him at an earlier age. He is thirteen years old before he undertakes category invention, that intricate course with the simple name. He is fourteen years old when he enters the dangerous field of panphilosophical clarification. But he will have been constructing comprehensive philosophies for two years, and he will have the background for the final clarification.

We should look more closely at this other way of education. In some respects it is better than our own. Few Earth children would be able to construct an organic and sentient robot within fifteen minutes if given the test suddenly; most of them could not manufacture a living dog in that time. Not one Earth child in five could build a faster-than-light vehicle and travel it beyond our galaxy between now and midnight. Not one Earth child in a hundred could build a planet and have it a going concern within a week. Not one in a thousand would be able to comprehend pentacosmic logic.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Kidnapping five Camiroi at random and constituting them a pilot Earth PTA.

B. A little constructive book-burning, particularly in the education field.

C. Judicious hanging of certain malingering students.

Actually, the Camiroi are doing it the hard way: in case you missed the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in New York last Christmas, here's a short bit from the section on Medical Sciences in the program book:

Molecular Approaches to Learning and Memory: *The availability of a variety of experimental techniques which can manipulate memory consolidation, enhancement as well as inhibition, have made it possible to propose definitive stages in memory storage. The nature of these stages in molecular terms is suggested by ... anatomical, chemical, and metabolic changes which are correlated with learning. ...*

The major emphasis of the second session will be an attempt to describe and evaluate the new and controversial field of behavorial modification by injection of brain derived materials, so-called 'memory transfer'.

When I was Miss Dow
Sonya Dorman

These hungry, mother-haunted people come and find us living in what they like to call crystal palaces, though really we live in glass places, some of them highly ornamented and others plain as paper. They come first as explorers, and perhaps realise we are a race of one sex only, rather amorphous beings of proteide; and we, even baby I, are Protean, also, being able to take various shapes at will. One sex, one brain lobe, we live in more or less glass bridges over the humanoid chasm, eating, recreating, attending races and playing other games like most living creatures.

Eventually, we're all dumped into the cell banks and reproduced once more.

After the explorers comes the colony of miners and scientists. The Warden and some of the other elders put on faces to greet them, agreeing to help with the mining of some ores, even giving them a koota or two as they become interested in our racing dogs. They set up their places of life, pop up their machines, bang-bang, chug-chug; we put on our faces, forms smiles and costumes; I am old enough to learn to change my shape, too.

The Warden says to me, "It's about time you made a change, yourself. Some of your friends are already working for these people, bringing home credits and sulfas."

My Uncle (by the Warden's fourth conjunction) made himself over at the start, being one of the first to realise how it could profit us.

I protest to the Warden, "I'm educated and trained as a scholar. You always say I must remain deep in my mathematics and other studies."

My Uncle says, "You have to do it. There's only one way for us to get along with them," and he runs his fingers through his long blonde hair. My Uncle's not an educated person, but highly placed, politically, and while Captain Dow is around my Uncle retains this particular shape. The Captain is shipping out soon, then Uncle will find some other features, because he's already warned that it's unseemly for him to be chasing around in the face of a girl after the half-bearded boys from the space ships. I don't want to do this myself, wasting so much time, when the fourteen decimals even now are clicking on my mirrors.

The Warden says, "We have a pattern from a female botanist, she ought to do for you. But before we put you into the pattern tank,

you'll have to approximate another brain lobe. They have two."

"I know," I say, sulkily. A botanist. A she!

"Into the tank," the Warden says to me without mercy, and I am his to use as he believes proper.

I spend four days in the tank absorbing the female Terran pattern. When I'm released, the Warden tells me, "Your job is waiting for you. We went to a lot of trouble to arrange it." He sounds brusque, but perhaps this is because he hasn't conjoined for a long time. The responsibilities of being Warden of Mines and Seeds come first, long before any social engagement.

I run my fingers through my brunette curls, and notice my Uncle is looking critically at me. "Haven't you made yourself rather old?" he asks.

"Oh, he's all right," the Warden says. "Thirty-three isn't badly matched to the Doctor, as I understand it."

Dr. Arnold Proctor, the colony's head biologist, is busy making radiograph pictures (with his primitive X-rays) of skeletal structures: murger birds, rodents, and our pets and racers, the kootas — dogs to the Terrans, who are fascinated by them. We breed them primarily for speed and stamina, but some of them carry a gene for an inherited structural defect which cripples them and they have to be destroyed before they are full grown. The Doctor is making a special study of kootas.

He gets up from his chair when I enter his office. "I'm Miss Dow, your new assistant," I say, hoping my long fingernails will stand up to the pressure of punch keys on the computer, since I haven't had much practise in retaining foreign shapes. I'm still in uncertain balance between myself and Martha Dow, who is also myself. But one does not have two lobes for nothing, I discover.

"Good morning. I'm glad you're here," the Doctor says.

He is a nice, pink man, with silver hair, soft-spoken, intelligent. I'm pleased, as we work along, to find he doesn't joke and wisecrack like so many of the Terrans, though I am sometimes whimsical. I like music and banquets as well as my studies.

Though absorbed in his work, Dr. Proctor isn't rude to interrupters. A man of unusual balance, coming as he does from a culture which sends out scientific parties that are ninety per cent of one sex, when their species provides them with two. At first meetings he is dedicated but agreeable, and I'm charmed.

"Dr. Proctor," I ask him one morning. "Is it possible for you to radiograph my koota? She's very fine, from the fastest stock available, and I'd like to breed her."

"Yes, yes, of course," he promises with his quick, often absent, smile. "By all means. You wish to breed only the best." It's typical of

him to assume we're all as dedicated as he.

My Uncle's not pleased. "There's nothing wrong with your koota," he says. "What do you want to X-ray her for? Suppose he finds something is wrong? You'll be afraid to race or breed her, and she won't be replaced. Besides, your interest in her may make him suspicious."

"Suspicious of what?" I ask, but my Uncle won't say, so I ask him, "Suppose she's bred and her pups are cripples?"

The Warden says, "You're supposed to have your mind on your work, not on racing. The koota was just to amuse you when you were younger."

I lean down and stroke her head, which is beautiful, and she breathes a deep and gentle breath in response.

"Oh, let him go," my Uncle says wearily. He's getting disgusted because they didn't intend for me to bury myself in a laboratory or a computer room, without making more important contacts. But a scholar is born with a certain temperament, and has an introspective nature, and as I'm destined to eventually replace the Warden, naturally I prefer the life of the mind.

"I must say," my Uncle remarks, "you look the image of a Terran female. Is the work interesting?"

"Oh, yes, fascinating," I reply, and he snorts at my lie, since we both know it's dull and routine, and most of the time is spent working out the connections between my two brain lobes, which still present me with some difficulty.

My koota bitch is subjected to a pelvic radiograph. Afterwards, I stand on my heels in the small, darkened cubicle, looking at the film on the viewing screen. There he stands, too, with his cheekbones emerald in the peculiar light, and his hair, which is silver in daylight, looks phosphorescent. I resist this. I am resisting this Doctor with the X-ray eyes who can examine my marrow with ease. He sees Martha's marrow, every perfect corpuscle of it.

You can't imagine how comforting it is to be so transparent. There's no need to pretend, adjust, advance, retreat or discuss the oddities of my planet. We are looking at the X-ray film of my prized racer and companion to determine the soundness of her hip joints, yet I suspect the Doctor, platinum-green and tall as a tower, is piercing my reality with his educated gaze. He can see the blood flushing my surfaces. I don't need to do a thing but stand up straight so the crease of fat at my waist won't distort my belly button, the centre of it all.

"You see?" he says.

I do see, looking at the film in the darkness where perfection or disaster may be viewed, and I'm twined in the paradox which

confronts me here. The darker the room, the brighter the screen and the clearer the picture. Less light! and the truth becomes more evident. Either the koota is properly jointed and may be bred without danger of passing the gene on to her young, or she is not properly jointed, and cannot be used. Less light, more truth! And the Doctor is green sculpture — a little darker and he would be a bronze — but his natural colour is pink alabaster.

"You see," the Doctor says, and I do try to see. He points his wax pencil at one hip joint on the film, and says, "A certain amount of osteo-arthritic buildup is already evident. The cranial rim is wearing down, she may go lame. She'll certainly pass the defect on to some of her pups, if she's bred."

This koota has been my playmate and friend for a long time. She retains a single form, that of koota, full of love and beautiful speed; she has been a source of pleasure and pride.

Dr. Proctor, of the pewter hair, will discuss the anatomical defects of the koota in a gentle and cultivated voice. I am disturbed. There shouldn't be any need to explain the truth, which is evident. Yet it seems that to comprehend the exposures, I require a special education. It's said that the more you have seen, the quicker you are to sort the eternal verities into one pile and the dismal illusions into another. How is it that sometimes the Doctor wears a head which resembles that of a koota, with a splendid muzzle and noble brow?

Suddenly he gives a little laugh and points the end of the wax pencil at my navel, announcing: "There. There, it is essential that the belly button onto the pelvis, or you'll bear no children."

Thoughts of offspring had occurred to me. But weren't we discussing my racer? The radiograph film is still clipped to the view screen, and upon it, spread-eagled, appears the bony Rorschach of my koota bitch, her hip joints expressing doom.

I wish the Doctor would put on the daylight. I come to the conclusion that there's a limit to how much truth I can examine, and the more I submit to the conditions necessary for examining it, the more unhappy I become.

Dr. Proctor is a man of such perfect integrity that he continues to talk about bones and muscles until I'm ready to scream for mercy. He has done something that is unusual and probably prohibited, but he's not aware of it. I mean it must be prohibited in his culture, where it seems they play on each other, but not with each other. I am uneasy, fluctuating.

He snaps two switches. Out goes the film and on goes the sun, making my eyes stream with sensitive and grateful tears, although he's so adjusted to these contrasts he doesn't so much as blink. Floating in

the sunshine I've become opaque. He can't see anything but my surface tensions, and I wonder what he does in his spare time. A part of me seems to tilt, or slide.

"There, there, oh dear, Miss Dow," he says, patting my back, rubbing my shoulder blades. His forearms and fingers extend gingerly. "You do want to breed only the best, don't you?" he asks. I begin within me a compulsive ritual of counting the elements; it's all I can do to keep communications open between my brain lobes. I'm suffering from eclipses: one goes dark, the other lights up, that one goes dark, the other goes nova.

"There, there," the Doctor says, distressed because I'm quivering and trying to keep the connections open; I have never felt clogged before. They may have to put me back into the pattern tank.

Profoundly disturbed, I lift my face, and he gives me a kiss. Then I'm all right, balanced again, one lobe composing a concerto for virtix flute, the other one projecting, "Oh Arnie, on Arnie." Yes, I'm okay for the shape I'm in. He's marking my joints with his wax pencil (the marks of which can be easily erased from the film surface) and he's mumbling, "It's essential, oh yes, it's essential."

Finally he says, "I guess all of us colonists are lonely here," and I say, "Oh yes, aren't we," before I realise the enormity of the Warden's manipulations, and what a lot I have to learn. Evidently the Warden triple-carded me through the Colony Punch Centre as a Terran. I lie and say, "Oh, yes. Yes, yes. Oh, Arnie, put out the light," for we may find some more truth.

"Not here," Arnie says, and of course he's right. This is a room for study, for cataloguing obvious facts, not a place for carnival. There are not many places for it, I discover with surprise. Having lived in glass all my life I expect everyone else to be as comfortable there as I am but this isn't so.

Just the same we find his quarters, after dark, to be comfortable and free of embarrassment. You wouldn't think a dedicated man of his age would be so vigorous, but I find out he spends his weekends at the recreation centre hitting a ball with his hand. The ball bounces back off a wall and he hits it and hits it. Though he's given that up now because we're together on weekends, "You're more than an old bachelor like me deserves," he tells me.

"Why are you an old bachelor?" I ask him. I do wonder why, if it's something not to be.

He tries to explain it to me. "I'm not a young man. I wouldn't make a good husband, I'm afraid. I like to work late, to be undisturbed. In my leisure time, I like to make wood carvings. Sometimes I go to bed with the sun and sometimes I'm up working all night. And then children. No. I'm lucky to be an old bachelor," he says,

Arnie carves kaku wood, which has a brilliant grain and is soft enough to permit easy carving. He's working on a figure of a murger bird, whittling lengthwise down the wood so the grain, wavy, full of flowing, wedge-shaped lines, will represent the feathers. The lamp light shines on his hair and the crinkle of his eyelids as he looks down and carves, whittles, turns. He's absorbed in what he doesn't see there but he's projecting what he wants to see. It's the reverse of what he must do in the viewing room. I begin to suffer a peculiar pain, located in the nerve cluster between my lungs. He's not talking to me. He's not caressing me. He's forgotten I'm here, and like a false projection, I'm beginning to fade. In another hour perhaps the film will become blank. If he doesn't see me, then am I here? He's doing just what I do when absorbed in one of my own projects, and I admire the intensity with which he works: it's magnificent. Yes, I'm jealous of it. I burn with rage and jealousy. He has abandoned me to be Martha and I wish I were myself again, free in shape and single in mind. Not this sack of mud clinging to another. Yet he's teaching me that it's good to cling to another. I'm exhausted from strange disciplines. Perhaps he's tired, too; I see that sometimes he kneads the muscles of his stomach with his hands, and closes his eyes.

The Warden sits me down on one of my rare evenings home, and talks angrily. "You're making a mistake," he says. "If the Doctor finds out what you are, you'll lose your job with the colony. Besides, we never supposed you'd have a liaison with only one man. You were supposed to start with the Doctor, and go on from there. We need every credit you can bring in. And by the way, you haven't done well on that score lately. Is he stingy?"

"Of course he isn't."

"But all you bring home in credits is your pay."

I can think of no reply. It's true the Warden has a right to use me in whatever capacity would serve us all best, as I will use others when I'm a Warden, but he and my Uncle spend half the credits from my job on sulfadiazole, to which they've become addicted.

"You've no sense of responsibility," the Warden says. Perhaps he's corning close to time for conjunction again, and this makes him more concerned about my stability.

My Uncle says, "Oh, he's young, leave him alone. As long as he turns over most of those pay credits to us. Though what he uses the remainder for, I'll never know."

I use it for clothes at the Colony Exchange. Sometimes Arnie takes me out for an evening, usually to the Laugh Tree Bar, where the space crews, too, like to relax. The bar is the place to find joy babies: young, pretty, planet-born girls who work at the Colony Punch Centre during

the day, and spend their evenings here competing for the attention of the officers. Sitting here with Arnie, I can't distinguish a colonist's daughter from one of my friends or relatives. They wouldn't know me, either.

Once, at home, I try to talk with a few of these friends about my feelings. But I discover that whatever female patterns they've borrowed are superficial ones; none of them bother to grow an extra lobe, but merely tuck the Terran pattern into a corner of their own for handy reference. They are most of them on sulfas. Hard and shiny toys, they skip like pebbles over the surface of the colonists' lives.

Then they go home, revert to their own free forms, and enjoy their mathematics, colours, compositions, and seedings.

"Why me?" I demand of the Warden. "Why two lobes? Why me?"

"We felt you'd be more efficient," he answers, "And while you're here, which you seldom are these days, you'd better revert to other shapes. Your particles may be damaged if you hold that woman form too long."

Oh, but you don't know, I want to tell him. You don't know I'll hold it forever. If I'm damaged or dead, you'll put me into the cell banks, and you'll be amazed, astonished, terrified, to discover that I come out complete, all Martha. I can't be changed.

"You little lump of protagon," my Uncle mumbles bitterly. "You'll never amount to anything, you'll never be a Warden. Have you done any of your own work recently?"

I say, "Yes, I've done some crystal divisions, and regrown them in non-established patterns." My Uncle is in a bad mood, as he's kicking sulfa and his nerve tissue is addled. I'm wise to speak quietly to him, but he still grumbles.

"I can't understand why you like being a two-lobed pack of giggles. I couldn't wait to get out of it. And you were so dead against it to begin with."

"Well, I have learned," I start to say, but can't explain what it is I'm still learning, and close my eyes. Part of it is that on the line between the darkness and the brightness it's easiest to float. I've never wanted to practise only easy things. My balance is damaged. I never had to balance. It's not a term or concept that I understand even now, at home, in free form. Some impress of Martha's pattern lies on my own brain cells. I suspect it's permanent damage, which gives me joy. That's what I mean about not understanding it. I am taught to strive for perfection. How can I be pleased with this, which may be a catastrophe?

Arnie carves on a breadth of kaku wood, bringing out to the surface a seascape. Knots become clots of spray, a flaw becomes wind-

blown spume. I want to be Martha. I'd like to go to the Laugh Tree with Arnie, for a good time, I'd like to learn to play cards with him.

You see what happens: Arnie is, in his way, like my original self, and I hate that part of him, since I've given it up to be Martha. Martha makes him happy, she is chocolate to his appetite, pillow for his weariness.

I turn for company to my koota. She's the colour of morning, her chest juts out like an axe blade, her ribs spring up and back like wings, her eyes are large and clear as she returns my gaze. Yet she's beyond hope; in a little time, she'll be lame; she cannot race any more, she must not mother a litter. I turn to her and she gazes back into my eyes, dreaming of speed and wind on the sandy beaches where she has run.

"Why don't you read some tapes?" Arnie suggests to me, because I'm restless and I disturb him. The koota lies at my feet. I read tapes. Every evening in his quarters Arnie carves, I read tapes, the broken racer lies at my feet. I pass through Terran history this way. When the clown tumbles into the tub, I laugh. Terran history is full of clowns and tubs; at first it seems that's all there is, but you learn to see beneath the comic costumes.

While I float on the taut line, the horizon between light and dark, where it's so easy, I begin to sense what is under the costumes: staggering down the street dead drunk on a sunny afternoon with everyone laughing at you; hiding under the veranda because you made blood come out of Pa's face; kicking a man when he's in the gutter because you've been kicked and have to pass it on. Tragedy is what one of the Terrans called being a poet in the body of a cockroach.

"Have you heard the rumour?" Arnie asks, putting down the whittling tool. "Have you heard that some of the personnel in Punch Centre aren't really humans?"

"Not really?" I ask, putting away the tape. We have no tragedy. In my species, family relationships are based only on related gene patterns; they are finally dumped into the family bank and a new relative is created from the old. It's one form of ancient history multiplying itself, but it isn't tragic. The koota, her utility destroyed by a recessive gene, lies sleeping at my feet. Is this tragedy? But she is a single form, she can't regenerate a lost limb, or exfoliate brain tissue. She can only return my gaze with her steadfast and affectionate one.

"What are they, then?" I ask Arnie. "If they're not human?"

"The story is that the local life forms aren't as we really see them. They've put on faces, like ours, to deal with us. And some of them have filtered into personnel."

Filtered! As if I were a virus.

"But they must be harmless," I say. "No harm has come to anyone."

"We don't know that for a fact," Arnie replies.

"You look tired," I say, and he comes to me, to be soothed, to be loved in his flesh, his single form, his search for the truth in the darkness of the viewing cubicle. At present he's doing studies of murger birds. Their spinal cavities are large, air-filled ovals, and their bone is extremely porous, which permits them to soar to great heights.

The koota no longer races on the wind-blown beaches; she lies at our feet, looking into the distance. The wall must be transparent to her eyes, I feel that beyond it she sees clearly how the racers go, down the long, bright curve of sand in the morning sun. She sighs, and lays her head down on her narrow, delicate paws. I look into the distance too: bright beaches and Arnie, carrying me from his ship. But he will not carry me again.

Arnie says, "I seem to be tired all the time." He puts his head on my breast. "I don't think the food's agreeing with me, lately."

"Do you suffer pains?" I ask him, curiously.

"Suffer," he mutters. "What kind of nonsense is that, with analgesics. No I don't suffer. I just don't feel well."

He's absorbed in murger birds, kaku wood, he descends into the bottom of the darks and rises up like a rocket across the horizon into the thin clarity above, while I float. I no longer dare to breathe. I'm afraid of disturbing everything. I do not want anything. His head lies gently on my breast and I will not disturb him.

"Oh. My God." Arnie says and I know what it's come to, even before he begins to choke, and his muscles leap although I hold him in my arms. I know his heart is choking on massive doses of blood; the brilliance fades from his eyes and they begin to go dark while I tightly hold him. If he doesn't see me as he dies, will I be here?

I can feel, under my fingers, how rapidly his skin cools. I must put him down, here with his carvings and his papers, and I must go home. But I lift Arnie in my arms, and call the koota, who gets up rather stiffly. It's long after dark, and I carry him slowly, carefully, home to what he called a crystal palace, where the Warden and my Uncle are teaching each other to play chess with a set some space captain gave them in exchange for seed crystals. They sit in a bloom of light, sparkling, their old brains bent over the chessmen, as I breathe open the door and carry Arnie in.

First, my Uncle gives me just a glance, but then another glance, and a hard stare. "Is that the Doctor?" he asks.

I put Arnie down and hold one of his cold hands. "Warden," I say,

on my knees, on eye level with the chesssboard and its carved men. "Warden, can you put him in one of the banks?"

The Warden turns to look at me, as hard as my Uncle. "You've become deranged, trying to maintain two lobes," he says. "You cannot reconstitute or recreate a Terran by our methods, and you must know it."

"Over the edge, over the edge," my Uncle says, now a blonde, six-foot, hearty male Terran, often at the Laugh Tree with one of the joy babies. He enjoys life, his own or someone else's. I have, too, I suppose. Am I fading? I am, really, just one of Arnie's projections, a form on a screen in his mind. I am not, really, Martha. Though I tried.

"We can't have him here," the Warden says. "You better get him out of here. You couldn't explain a corpse like that to the colonists, if they come looking for him. They'll think we did something to him. It's nearly time for my next conjunction, do you want your nephew to arrive in disgrace? The Uncles will drain his bank."

The Warden gets up and comes over to me. He takes hold of my dark curls and pulls me to my feet. It hurts my physical me, which is Martha. God knows Arnie, I'm Martha, it seems to me. "Take him back to his quarters," the Warden says to me. "And come back here immediately. I'll try to see you back to your own pattern, but it may be too late. In part, I blame myself. If you must know. So I will try."

Yes, yes, I want to say to him; as I was, dedicated, free; turn me back into myself. I never wanted to be anyone else, and now I don't know if I am anyone at all. The light's gone from his eyes and he doesn't see me, or see anything, does he?

I pick him up and breathe the door out, and go back through the night to his quarters, where the lamp still burns. I'm going to leave him here, where he belongs. Before I go, I pick up the small carving of the murger bird, and take it with me, home to my glass bridge where at the edge of the mirrors the decimals are still clicking perfectly, clicking out known facts; an octagon can be reduced, the planet turns at such a degree on its axis, to see the truth you must have light of some sort, but to see the light you must have darkness of some sort. I can no longer float on the horizon between the two because that horizon has disappeared. I've learned to descend, and to rise, and descend again.

I'm able to revert without help to my own free form, to re-absorb the extra brain tissue. The sun comes up and it's bright. The night comes down and it's dark. I'm becoming somber, and a brilliant student. Even my Uncle says I'll be a good Warden when the time comes.

The Warden goes to conjunction; from the cell banks a nephew is

lifted out. The koota lies dreaming of races she has run in the wind. It is our life, and it goes on, like the life of other creatures.

There is no cohesive or directional 'movement' in American s-f comparable to the British happening. The 'category' field is bigger, more lucrative, and more prestigious than anyone could have imagined a decade ago, but the bolder young writers are little drawn to it; and there is a growing Inner Establishment which clearly feels, 'What was new enough for Daddy is new enough for you.'

Some fine work has appeared in American magazines and 'category' s-f books recently under unfamiliar by-lines: but the best of it is usually from practiced hands drifting in from other fields (Harvey Jacobs,Gilbert Thomas, Virginia Kidd, etc.) or from the new British names (not represented here: David Redd, Keith Roberts, Josephine Saxton). And even this work tends to be strongly traditional in flavor, and conventional in subject matter and technique.

It is too easy to lay the blame at the door of editorial stodginess, or mass-market commercialism. Harlan Ellison, self-appointed prophet of the 'New Thing' in American s-f, spent two years energetically soliciting material for a much-publicised 'no-taboo' anthology of original stories (Dangerous Visions, *Daubleday, 1967), and wound up with 33 fair-to-first-rate selections — of which half a dozen* might *have had some difficulty selling to the American s-f magazines.*

The last notable influx of radical new talent, between 1960 and 1963, included Norman Spinrad, Roger Zelazny, Piers Anthony, Jonathan Brand and David Bunch, as well as Lafferty, Delany, Dorman, and Disch. I think it is significant, and probably a Good Thing, that very few of these new people (or the even newer ones, like John Sladek, Joanna Russ, James Sallis) limit themselves, as an earlier generation largely did, to one area of expression: they are painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers, actors, poets, playwrights, critics, scenarists, as well as fiction writers — mirroring the painters, poets, musicians, etc., on the 'outside' who are adopting so much of the idiom of science fiction.

Both Sonya Dorman and Tom Disch, as it happens, started out with an interest in the dance, then turned to poetry, and then to s-f. Mrs. Dorman is still better known for her poetry than for her rare (and I use the word with care) fiction. Disch's poetry has just begun to be noticed by his first novel, The Genocides *(1965), stirred up a storm of controversy, and his next* (Camp Concentration, *serialised in* New Worlds *and forthcoming from Doubleday) is likely to renew it, violently, (Doubleday is also publishing a 'black humour' novel by Disch and Sladek:* Black Alice.)

A Vacation on Earth
Thomas M. Disch

Chiefly, it is blue. People use
the old archaic words, which sound
lark-like on their tongues,
not on mine. "I am fine,
thank you." Or: "Could you direct me
to the Mediterranean Sea?"
I ate an 'ice cream' cone,
and I saw the recent Pope.
It is hard to believe
we have our source in this nightmare
tangle of vegetable matter and stone,
that this hell is where
it all began. Yet there is something
in the light or in the air ...
I don't know what, but it is there.
I never thought I would descend
to such bathos! I did not come to
Earth to dredge up these worthless weary myths.
There was no mother at my birth —
I do not need one now.
Yesterday I visited Italy: Rome,
Florence, Venice, and the famous church
museum. There was little I missed
But tomorrow, thank god, I go home.

Take a word. Take lots. Call them words. *Call them a* medium.

Everybody uses them. In our culture, almost everybody reads and writes them. All rational thought, almost all consciousness (of even 'purely sensory' experience), is locked firmly into a linguistic framework. Only the mathematicians and the widely multilingual have even comparative freedom from the limitations on logic inherent in the cultural happenstance of native language. In music and mystical/religious experience, sometimes in dance or athletic or sexual activity, occasionally through the graphic arts, we have brief moments of truly nonverbal perception. It is possible

that as little as one more decade of electronic-media 'participation involvement' and 'psychedelic' (with or without drugs) transcendentalism and biochemical advance in molecular learning theory, may produce the first generation of a truly revolutionary civilisation, a sophistication not chained to verbal symbols. Today we are all, still, far more enslaved by synaptic/semantic matrices of language than we are influenced — for good or ill — by any other medium of communication.

The word-craftsman, the writer, is both the sorcerer and spellbound victim of word enchantment. Every serious writer I have ever known is a word-gamer/tamer. It may not be visible in the published work: some of the best prose is apparently artless. But its author is probably a secret crossword-puzzler or cryptographer — or it might be Scrabble or Anagrams, formal verse (if only for the desk drawer), foreign languages, Finnegan's Wake *explications, or simple refreshing plunges into atlas or dictionary reading.*

Or dictionary writing.

Science-fiction writers carry this farther than most: there are very few who have not at least once constructed an extensive glossary of an 'alien' language, (If a story contains five words of Arcturan, you may be assured that a lexicography of 50 or 500 more was on a wall chart or in a notebook at the author's left hand as he worked. I myself have a cardfile indexing a complete genealogy of more than a hundred names cross-bred on board a star-ship originally crewed by twenty women and four men — the residue of two short stories totalling less than 10,000 words.) Few of these ventures remain parenthetical in nature although they are sometimes more inventive and engaging than the formal stories. One reason I embrace the word fabulation *so eagerly is that it provides an extension of critical vocabulary for the discussion of the increasingly acceptable and necessary body of work which is neither 'fiction' by traditional standards, nor 'essay' nor 'exposition' nor 'reportage': something that might have been called* fiction-science. *(The classic example would be Asimov's famous 'Thiotimoline' article; the best-known recent one,* The Report from Iron Mountain.) *'Confluence' is one of the rare pieces of this sort to see prints although its publication in* Punch *was in a slightly altered version.*

Confluence
Brian W. Aldiss

The inhabitants of the planet Myrin have much to endure from Earthmen, inevitably, perhaps, since they represent the only intelligent life we have so far found in the galaxy. The Tenth Research Fleet has already left for Myrin. Meanwhile, some of the fruits of earlier expeditions are ripening.

As has already been established, the superior Myrinian culture, the so-called Confluence of Headwaters, is somewhere in the region of eleven million (Earth) years old, and its language, Confluence, has been established even longer. The etymological team of the Seventh Research Fleet was privileged to sit at the feet of two gentlemen of the Oeldrid Stance Academy. They found that Confluence is a language-cum-posture, and that meanings of words can be radically modified or altered entirely by the stance assumed by the speaker. There is, therefore, no possibility of ever compiling a one-to-one dictionary of English-Confluence, Confluence-English words.

Nevertheless, the list of Confluent words that follows disregards the stances involved, which number almost nine thousand and are all named, and merely offers a few definitions, some of which must be regarded as tentative. The definitions are, at this early stage of our knowledge of Myrinian culture, valuable in themselves, not only because they reveal something of the inadequacy of our own language, but because they throw some light on to the mysteries of an alien culture. The romanised phonetic system employed is that suggested by Dr. Rohan Prendernath, one of the members of the etymological team of the Seventh Research Fleet, without whose generous assistance this short list could never have been complied.

AB WE TEL MIN - The sensation that one neither agrees nor disagrees with what is being said to one, but that one simply wishes to depart from the presence of the speaker

ARN TUTKHAN - Having to rise early before anyone else is about; addressing a machine

BAGI RACK - Apologising as a form of attack; a stick resembling a gun

BAG RACK - Needless and offensive apologies

BAMAN - The span of a man's consciousness

BI - The name of the mythical northern cockerel; a reverie that lasts for more than twenty (Earth) years

BI SAN - A reverie lasting more than twenty years and of a

religious nature

BIT SAN - A reverie lasting more than twenty years and of a blasphemous nature

BI TOSI - A reverie lasting more than twenty years on cosmological themes

BI TVAS - A reverie lasting more than twenty years on geological themes

BIUI TOSI - A reverie lasting more than a hundred and forty-two years on cosmological themes; the sound of air in a cavern; long dark hair

BIUT TASH - A reverie lasting more than twenty years on **Har Dar Ka** - themes

CANO LEE MIN - Things sensed out-of-sight that will return

CA PATA VATUZ - The taste of a maternal grandfather

CHAM ON TH ZAM - Being witty when nobody else appreciates it

DAR AYRHOH - The garments of an ancient crone; the age-old supposition that Myrin is a hypothetical place

EN IO PLAY - The deliberate dissolving of the senses into sleep

GEE KUTCH - Solar empathy

GE NU - The sorrow that overtakes a mother knowing her child will be born dead

GE NUP DIMU - The sorrow that overtakes the child in the womb when it knows it will be born dead

GOR A - Ability to live for eight hundred years

HA ATUZ SHAK EAN - Disgrace attending natural death of maternal grandfather

HAR DAR KA - The complete understanding that all the soil of Myrin passes through the bodies of its earthworms every ten years

HAR DIDI KAL - A small worm; the hypothetical creator of a hypothetical sister planet of Myrin

HE YUP - The first words the computers spoke, meaning, 'The light will not be necessary'

HOLT CHA - The feeling of delight that precedes and precipitates wakening

HOLT CHE - The autonomous marshalling of the senses which produces the feeling of delight that precedes and precipitates wakening

HOZ STAP GURT - A writer's attitude to fellow writers

INK TH O - Morality used as an offensive weapon

JELY JIP TUP - A thinking machine that develops a stammer; the action of pulling up the trousers while running uphill

JIL JIPY TUP - Any machine with something incurable about it; pleasant laughter that is nevertheless unwelcome; the action of pulling up the trousers while running downhill

KARNAD EES - The enjoyment of a day or a year by doing nothing; fasting

KARNDAL CHESS - The waste of a day or a year by doing nothing; fasting

KARNDOLI YON TOR - Mystical state attained through inaction; feasting; a learned paper on the poetry of metal

KARNDOL KI REE - The waste of a life by doing nothing; a type of fasting

KUNDULUM - To be well and in bed with two pretty sisters

LAHAH SIP - Tasting fresh air after one has worked several hours at one's desk

LA YUN UN - A struggle in which not a word is spoken; the underside of an inaccessible boulder; the part of one's life unavailable to other people

LEE KE MIN - Anything or anyone out-of-sight that one senses will never return; an apology offered for illness.

LIKI INK TH KUTI - The small engine that attends to one after the act of excretion

MAL - A feeling of being watched from within

MAN NAIZ TH - Being aware of electricity in wires concealed in the walls

MUR ON TIG WON - The disagreeable experience of listening to oneself in the middle of a long speech and neither understanding what one is saying nor enjoying the manner in which it is being said; a foreign accent; a lion breaking wind after the evening repast

NAM ON A - The remembrance, in bed, of camp fires

NO LEE LE MUN - The love of a wife that becomes especially vivid when she is almost out-of-sight

NU CROW - Dying before strangers

NU DI DIMU - Dying in a low place, often of a low fever

NU HIN DER VLAK - The invisible stars; forms of death

NUN MUM - Dying before either of one's parents; ceasing to fight just because one's enemy is winning

NUT LAP ME - Dying of laughing

NUT LA POM - Dying laughing

NUT VATO - Managing to die standing up

NUTVU BAG RACK - To be born dead

NU VALK - Dying deliberately in a lonely (high) place

OBI DAKT - An obstruction; three or more machines talking together

ORAN MUDA - A change of government; an old peasant saying meaning, 'The dirt in the river is different every day'

PAN WOL LE MUDA - A certainty that tomorrow will much resemble today; a line of manufacturing machines

PAT O BANE BAN - The ten heartbeats preceding the first heartbeat of orgasm

PI KI SKAB WE - The parasite that afflicts man and **Tig Gag** in its various larval stages and, while burrowing in the brain of the **Tig Gag**, causes it to speak like a man

PI SHAK RACK CHANO - The retrogressive dreams of autumn attributed to the presence in the bloodstream of **Pi Ki Skab We**

PIT HOR - Pig's cheeks, or the droppings of pigs; the act of name-dropping

PLAY - The heightening of consciousness that arises when one awakens in a strange room that one cannot momentarily identify

SHAK ALE MAN - The struggle that takes place in the night between the urge to urinate and the urge to continue sleeping

SHAK LA MAN GRA - When the urge to urinate takes precedence over the urge to continue sleeping

SHAK LO MUN GRAM - When the urge to continue sleeping takes precedence over all things

SHEAN DORL - Gazing at one's reflection for reasons other than vanity

SHE EAN MIK - Performing prohibited postures before a mirror

SHEM - A slight cold afflicting only one nostril; the thoughts that pass when one shakes hands with a politician

SHUK TACK - The shortening in life-stature a man incurs from a seemingly benevolent machine

SOBI - A reverie lasting less than twenty years on cosmological themes; a nickel

SODI DORL - One machine making way for another; decadence, particularly in the Cold Continents

SODI IN PIT - Any epithet which does not accurately convey what it intends, such as 'Sober as a judge', 'Silly nit', 'He swims like a fish', 'He's only half-alive', and so on

STAINI RACK NUSVIODON - Experiencing **Staini Rack Nuul** and then realising that one must continue in the same outworn fashion because the alternatives are too frightening, or because one is too weak to change; wearing a suit of clothes at which one sees strangers looking askance

STAINI RACK NUUL - Introspection (sometimes prompted by birthdays) that one is not living as one determined to live when one was very young; or, on the other hand, realising that one is living in a mode decided upon when one was very young and which is now no longer applicable or appropriate

STAIN TOK I - The awareness that one is helplessly living a role

STA SODON - The worst feelings which do not even lead to suicide

SU SODA VALKUS - A sudden realisation that one's spirit is not pure, overcoming one on Mount Rinvlak (in the Southern Continent)

TI - Civilised aggression

TIG GAG - The creature most like man in the Southern Continent which smiles as it sleeps

TIPY LAP KIN - Laughter that one recognises though the laughter is unseen; one's own laughter in a crisis

TOK AN - Suddenly divining the nature and imminence of old age in one's thirty-first year

TUAN BOLO - A class of people one only meets at weddings; the pleasure of feeling rather pale

TU KI TOK - Moments of genuine joy captured in a play or charade about joy; the experience of youthful delight in old age

TUZ PAT MAIN - *(Obs.)* The determination to eat one's maternal grandfather

U - *(Obs.)* The amount of time it takes for a lizard to turn into a bird; love

UBIA - girl who lifts her skirts at the very moment you wish she would

UDI KAL - The clothes of the woman one loves

UDI UKAL - The body of the woman one loves

UES WE TEL DA - Love between a male and female politician

UGI SLO GU - The love that needs a little coaxing

UMI RIN TOSIT - The sensations a woman experiences when she does not know how she feels about a man

UMY RIN RU - The new dimensions that take on illusory existence when the body of the loved woman is first revealed

UNIMGAG BU - Love of oneself that passes understanding; a machine's dream

UNK TAK - An out-of-date guide book; the skin shed by the snake that predicts rain

UPANG PLA - Consciousness that one's agonised actions undertaken for love would look rather funny to one's friends

UPANG PLA - Consciousness that while one's agonised actions undertaken for love are on the whole rather funny to oneself, they might even look heroic to one's friends; a play with a cast of three or less

U RIRHI - Two lovers drunk together

US ANA NUTO - A novel all about love, written by a computer

US AN I NUT - Dying for love

USAN I ZUN BI - Living for love; a tropical hurricane arriving from over the sea, generally at dawn

UZ - Two very large people marrying after the prime of life

UZ TO KARDIN - The realisation in childhood that one is the

issue of two very large people who married after the prime of life

WE FAAK - A park or a college closed for seemingly good reasons; a city where one wishes one could live

YA GAG - Too much education; a digestive upset during travel

YA GAG LEE - Apologies offered by a hostess for a bad meal

YA GA TUZ - Bad meat; *(Obs.)* dirty fingernails

YAG ORN - A president

YATUZ PATI - *(Obs.)* The ceremony of eating one's maternal grandfather

YATUZ SHAK SHAK NAPANG HOLI NUN - Lying with one's maternal grandmother; when hens devour their young

YE FLIG TOT - A group of men smiling and congratulating each other

YE FLU GAN - Philosophical thoughts that don't amount to much; graffiti in a place of worship

YON TORN - A paper tiger; two children with one toy

YON U SAN - The hesitation a boy experiences before first kissing his first girl

YOR KIN BE - A house; a circumlocution; a waterproof hat; the smile of a slightly imperfect wife

YUP PA - A book in which everything is understandable except the author's purpose in writing it

YUPPA GA - Stomach ache masquerading as eye-strain; a book in which nothing is understandable except the author's purpose in writing it

YUTH MOD - The assumed bonhomie of visitors and strangers

ZO ZO CIN - A woman in another field

More words: syntax, symbol, *and* space-time. *Syntax is a way of arranging symbols in space-time. When you invent new symbols, you must invent a syntax for them, or specify the known syntax in which they are designed to be used. When you move into a different continuum, your old syntax is likely to be totally useless, even if your usual symbols have retained their meaning. Changing your syntax can emphasise or modify the connotative significance of a symbol by displaying it in a new perspective.*

The most common use of the word syntax *refers to the use of words in sentences. A word is a word is a word, whether it be spoken in a cave, sung by a bard at a crowded fireside, flashed on a screen for subliminal perception, printed in graceful Gothic type on a page of elegant sentences, orated in a speech, intoned in a chant, shouted from a mountain-top (to the sound of one hand clapping), or broken up in typographic effects as part of a picture. But though the word remains the same, its impact, value, in-context meaning, colour, shape, sound, may vary enormously with the*

syntax.

Syntax trouble is symptomatic of our society — of any society in transition. Our intellects operate through the manipulation of codified symbols for abstractions; mathematics provides syntaxes for such symbols; so does myth; so does language.

It is tempting to abandon detachment and intellection entirely at a time when we are discovering, with astonished joy, the uses of involvement, immersion, sensual and transcendent experience. But we are no more suited to the role of exultant flowers than of emotionless computers: we are human beings, equipped for both sensual and sensible experience and behavior. Mathematicians began to create new syntaxes for their new concepts a hundred years ago; scientists today have frames of reference in which to manipulate the multiplex symbols of space-time. In sociology, theology, psychology, we are just starting to seek the new matrixes. If it seems the tines are out of joint, it is rather that our syntaxes — in mythology, in language — are out of joint with the times.

Meantime, we find ourselves falling back on words, away from sentences: simply nouns and verbs, or, subtly-complexly, the noun-verbs — the ones the old syntax called participles or gerundives, and the make-do ones pressed into crisis service: package, protest, love, broadcast, star, surround, contact, fix, talk ...

Double your meaning, double your fun.

The following selection consists of three excerpts from Part II of the novel Journal from Ellipsia *(Little Brown, 1965). It starts with the beginning of the actual 'journal'.*

from Journal from Ellipsia
Hortense Calisher

On, on, on and on, *on;* and on, and on, on. The paradox about distance is that quite as much philosophy adheres to a short piece of it as to a long. A being capable of setting theoretical limits to its universe has already been caught in the act of extending it. The merest cherub in the streets here, provided he has a thumbnail — and he usually has ten — does this every day. He may grow up to be one of their fuzzicists, able to conceive that space is curved, but essentially — that is, *elliptically* — he does nothing about it. He lives on, in his rare, rectilinear world of north-south gardens, east-west religions, up-and-down monuments and explosions, plus a blindly variable sort of shifting about which he claims to have perfected through his centuries, thinks very highly of, and, is rather pretty in its way and even its name: *free wall* — a kind of generalised travel-bureaudom of 'across'. It follows that most of his troubles are those of a partially yet imperfectly curved being who is still trying to keep to the straight-and-narrow — and most of his fantasies also. His highest aspiration is, quite naturally, 'to get a-Round'; his newest, to get Out.

And he will too, though in his current researches he may have reached only so far as the Omega particle. In the phenomenology of all peoples, the mind slowly becomes curved.

At least that is what Ours are matriculated to, and I had seen nothing to contradict this, during my all-to-brief sojourn in Bucks. Ah, what a mentor was there, was mine, though except for one, I never saw — as she taught me to say — Her!

As I taxied once again along the upper solitudes, trying not to arrive instantaneously at destination — which is of course Our main problem here — I thought of Her with considerable leaning. Leaning is to Us what yearning is to You — but that story will emerge later. The hardest thing to learn here — and still not mastered — is how to get about pornographically.

Meanwhile — and what a concept that is to a being accustomed to Ever — like standing *à point* as the meteors of thought surge by! This place is simply teeming with time. Excuse me. It is scarcely my fault if everything you do here is so attractive. *Meanwhile,* I was having my own practical problems, as I elided in and out, intent on not overshooting the mountains of the Ramapo. Omega particles indeed, to say nothing of such heavinesses as the baryons, neutrons and protons into which they here have finally divided that grossity of

theirs, the atom. Let them try iris-ing in, as I had done the first trip, from slightly more than thirteen billion light-years away, while receding therefore at more than the speed of light and hence invisible, on radiotelephone sources purporting to emanate from a nubbin of matter still acting flatly against its own spherical. On the darker side of which, for this my second trip, moonwise at their eleven o'clock (what a statement!), amid a smear of foothills, these directional signals would just probably be sending again, if She was able to arrange it, from apparatus just like that in Bucks — in an environ likewise named monosyllabically. (They yearn for our Oneness constantly. They are indeed a touching people.) *Hobbs.*

At the point where I re-entered their ionosphere, the dear curves of Our being — which they term 'body', and I must not forget to call 'my' — nearly reversed themselves, but thanks to the extreme elasticity of our mental curvature, these held. Shortly after, I entered that condition, common enough among us, which however sounds so regrettably silly in their language — and is indeed almost impossible to gauge in one where the *amount* of things so consistently takes precedence over their *unanimity*. There's no help for it. I became more Here than There. From then on it was easier; they tell me that things done for the second time here usually are. A 'second time' is one facet of their concept of two-ness that I had no trouble with, a kindly sign that the curves of our not quite cognate worlds do somewhere intersect. As I crossed, the far, reddish spectrum of Out There faded, gradually receded, whelmed by the increasing blue ozone of Right Here. From twenty thousand up, the daily height of their own traffic, once again their planet looked as extraordinary as any planet of the universe must look to the resident of another, up that close. Yes, I had done this before, experiencing no difficulty with their numerical progressions, and almost none with their time-sequences. It is only the two-ness of people that still gives me unutterable pause. In Bucks, I was told that monotheists here suffer almost the same tension over the many-goddedness which with us is so restful, all Our people being One.

I was told this by Marie, the mentor I found the less interesting, certainly not dear. Under less compelling circumstances, I should almost have dis-esteemed her, which with us is almost the end of negative emotion, opposite to the 'leaning' which is all but forbidden, and at about the same distance from the norm, which is 'to alike'. But here, it was their very difference — that word, that word — which excited me: two of them, two She's, and already so unalike. And as I was soon to know, this was nothing to another difference still to come. Which difference, they assure me, is to blame for all the others. Be that as it may, as I came in closer, almost to cloud, sure enough, I

smelled it for the second time. Miles out to star, you can smell it, the sharp tang of the variability here.

I hope I am allotting the sense data correctly, that is, each to its proper organ. One of the purposes of the preliminary teaching session at Bucks was to instruct me in the art of doing this. To visit here, to sight-see as it were, would be impossible under any continuous fusion of the senses such as we have; luckily we do have, unified but not inextricably, all your five. Sight and hearing are with us of an acuity and extension which to you would be! — and smell also. How indicate this, the way we function, to the uncurved! Suffice to say that, by means of an unbroken concatenation, we hear space, see time, and smell thought, the whole process being a warning one, directed not outward toward enjoyment, but inward against *change* — any tendency toward this being immediately corrected centre-wards. As for the sense of taste, due to the nature of our sustenance (do I not do your technical language rather well?) this is necessarily de-emphasised.

But as we airfeed, which is as close as I can. get to what we *do* do, we are often suffused with a generalised but delicate carbonation. There remains — the sense of touch.

And here, since both Ours and the beings here are creatures of flesh, not only of the same plasms but almost of the same cellular structure, the natures of both do, in one respect, very affectingly resemble one another. Our flesh, within its integument, is said to be of the tenuosity of veils, capable of supporting the insupportable; an ichor — to your pork. But let there be humility on both sides. Because of Our lack of protuberance without, and Our imponderability within — in fact because of that very serenity of curve which suits us to distances of a continuum which to your asymmetry would not be habitable — we are under repulsion to surround Ourselves, each of Us, at least for domestic purposes, with an electrical field which bars us from any intimacy with objects, and — in theory — between Ourselves. Whereas you, by reason of the extraordinary conglomeration of extruded shapes, organs, compounds and ligatures, and above all weights common to every one of you — are deliriously bashable! According to my mentor, by almost anything or anyone, anywhere.

And is it not then remarkable, that under such separate states of affairs, across all the galaxies of consciousness, You and We should both suffer from an almost identical ... spiritual shame? In the final sense, then, do we not beautifully, *elliptically* — touch?

Which is what so excited both me and my dear mentor, and from the moment of my arrival in Bucks was the constant roundelay of all our conversation, this, because of the still fragile state of my

sensibility, conducted entirely by intercom. (Until that fairly frightening adieu.) "Whereas — " said She, in the language agreed upon for Monday, Tuesday and Friday. Wednesdays and Saturdays she taught me to converse in her native one — too volatile by far. As beings of negative gravity or mass-gravity relation, we understandably ground better in the heavier languages. Sunday, her day off, she practiced her own Elsewhere. So it was, by such routines, they taught me a number of things at once — from Days of the Week to all the primary facts of Differential Experience: National, Linguistic *and Individual* — just as you teach your young to colour-count-read. I was even learning to daydream qualitatively, in tints and adjectives, and even with what I fancied might be, heroines, though as yet I had never seen one. Sunday is white gloomy, rich, British, and Protestant. Sunday is Marie.

"Whereas — " said my dear mentor. Though as yet I had not seen any of them of either kind, I imagined Her. Longitudinally oval, like myself — and pinkish too. But. But with a spot of difference somewhere. Where should it be — where? This was as far as I could go. I could never decide.

"Whereas — " She said, "the Ones in Ellipsia can only *lean* together, in sad-sweet contemplation of their Sameness — "

Ah, their She's, what teachers they are! Tongueless as I am, I found a vibration to answer her. "Where-ere-as!"

"And we," She said. It was still strange to hear her say 'we' in the sense of a two-ness or more-than-one, in contrast to the elliptic We — our only equivalent to her 'I'. In the very first lessons, when we could communicate in little more than signals, she had told me that I would graduate into comprehension here only when I fully understood the pronouns. As, in all their magnificent hierarchy, I now do.

"And we — " I answered. "No, no," I corrected myself — at the time, I could give the responses only by rote. "One begs pardon. And *You* — "

It *was* hard. At home of course, collectively we referred to ourselves as Ours, not too far afield from the practice here. But if One of us encounters One of us, the form of mutual address remains One. There is no transmogrification into 'You-ness'. The rule to remember for Us — She commented later that the very sound of it soothed the irritations of this world — is that One and One are One ... We have Our plural, but singly we are the same. Never, never, does One and One make Two.

"Oh, la, la!" She said. "*One* begs pardon?" Over the intercom there came a mutter: *Comme c'est chic, ça,* perhaps not intended to be heard.

"We beg pardon," was my limp answer. Oh, it's all very laughable, once one has the language of any Elsewhere as completely as you will

have noted yours is now mine; how I can skip flealy from uppercase to lower, in the pronoundest sense of any occasion. But memory still pains. Those first tingles of the singular!

"Come, come," said the intercom, but softly. She was ever kindly. *"N'ayez peur, mon vieux ... mon fils ... ma soeur ... ?"* There was even a giggle. After all, there were certain perplexities on her side — what, after all, was my *gender?* And I could not help her. If we in Ellipsia have gender, or once had — there is a myth to the effect that we once had, and that it still may be recovered — it lies deep to-down the inconscious. I know that there is hope — that just as the crustaceans regenerate limbs lost to the sharks of time, so we — But I could not help her then. I did not know.

"Come now."

To say what was next expected of me took more than a moment, in which the very veils of my finer flesh rent themselves ... or congealed? Then, our rote habits and disciplines being very useful here, as they knew, I was able to say it: "I."

This was the crux of it. Even now I sometimes lose the ego-ness that is needed to make that feeling — that moment when the One rouses from the everslump of curve — and stands up *straight.* When the One becomes: a one. Even now, I am prone to give the old, collective answer.

"*I* beg pardon," I said dutifully.

"Bon," She said. "So far, so good. But it would be even more perfect if you say, " 'I beg *your* — ' Eh?"

As I had soon learned, She is never quite satisfied — this is why they make good teachers. Though this may give them trouble when they visit us, much as they may think from here that they will want to move forevermore only in the Circles of Satisfaction. Once, when I had questioned her very seriously She had answered: No, to be fair, not to be satisfied was a characteristic of *both* halves of Them. Though it would not have been polite to tell her so, I was glad to have some slight fears allayed. For consider: even at home I had after all been One not content with Our circle — and if that should by any chance be an indication of gender, then — No, I did not wish it, somehow. And somehow, I did not think — No, I couldn't be. Good God — Marie had taught me that phrase. Good God — suppose I should be a Marie!

"Oh, sorry!" I said now, absently. "That's what I should have said of course. 'I beg *your* — ' But I'm afraid I rather lost the train of thought. Please remind I. What was I begging pardon *for?*"

I never knew where in that great glass house their side of the intercom was located, being more than content to keep to the room specially prepared in advance for me. This was more on my part than a natural contentedness of disposition. For, until I had undergone the

full program, including — besides dispensing entirely with the electrical barrier we switched off only secretly at home — Weightfulness, Visibility, and above all how to reduce Instantaneity — it was dangerous for me not to; language was only the first stop. So I was quite reposed to be where I was, learning their seasonal changes, snow to sprout, as I could view them in the great woodpile that pressed against the glass, accustoming myself to this uneasily irregular countryside, after Our calmly monolisting Ovaloid — I had no idea how half-cognate you and we are, until I saw your Sea. But at the time, I couldn't get over now stock-still, relatively speaking, everything seemed to be here. In the one non-glass wall, there were shelves holding books of instruction in an electro-braille not unlike records we have preserved, plus some enormous blown-up photostats of the greater carnivores and herbivores, all this to serve until my inner gyrations reduced themselves to the needs of print. Now and then, animals and insects of the minor domestic sort were patrolled across the glass, in a reverse of zoo — or perhaps, in order to show me the causality here, they were let fly to dog me of themselves. For, after Two-ness, there comes the other great thing to learn about a variable world in a state of semi-decontrol — that they here cannot wholly distinguish between the tides of causality and accident. Even when dealing with objects, one has to distinguish between these two hallmarks very carefully, since matter here comes in such an onslaught of forms. So, as yet they have not learned how to so classify events here. That is why, at home, every effort is made to have Events take a circular continuity. For, neither have we.

At this moment, for instance, there was such absolute silence over the intercom that I even wondered whether, in the daily sessions where my pair of mentors, working together from the office, had me practice how to plod timespace as they do, slowly, courting every possible friction instead of avoiding it — whether, by intent or not, they hadn't drained so much instantaneity from me that they were already gone.

"Mentor." I said. I had never had this feeling before; of course, most that they have here, I have never had. Loss? A kind of fleshly desolation. "Mentor!" I said again, and then, pleading, the word that she had now and then let me use on a Saturday. *"Mère!"*

Silence. It hurts — the vacuum's first, puckering awareness of what it is. I began to understand more of what it would mean for a One to try to become a 'one', or even to live in that world. To grow all the feelings I would need, could I do it; could I bear it? All these to be coursing undictated, tiger after lamb, lamb after tiger, through the beautiful, flickering glades that the beings here must have inside them? — It had not yet been thrust upon me that, according to my

needs, these pains would be thrust upon me. According to my needs.

Then the intercom vibrated, stuttering under the timbre of the message it carried. The walls of the room, being non-conductive glass, held me fast, bordering my instantaneity, else what a vast, electrical spreading might not have occurred? As it was, Her words went right through me.

"Chéri." She said. *"Chéri."*

Yes, the words went through me, and dispersed themselves. And somewhere within, a little of their irradiation clung Little by little, by such exercises, is weightfulness learned.

"*Chéri,* I suppose you know what you've done?"

"What?" I could not have phrased it, but I already knew. That too is a feeling!

"You've learned it. You've done it. You 'ave said it as we do, without thinking. The 'I' ... "

When a 'one' of the beings here first begins to suspect that he is acquiring a character, or as you like to say, firming one, the first thing he asks himself to do is to test it, in order to find out what it is. And in my progress toward becoming one of you, I was no exception. Since, at home, character is unmixed with gender, I was perhaps under even direr need to do so, being totally unable to distinguish between them. Perhaps both were acquired at one strike here, which would certainly be by far the most economical, I found myself dunking, then scalded myself for hanging on to an idea which was far too much like Us — such was not the style in which they would handle things in this marvellously spendrift world. They would certainly be more haphazard about something so important here. And there must be some prescribed one of their hazards which would be the proper test for what I now had.

How I was to find out by myself what this test was for a few paltry minutes perplexed me, until it occurred to me that I need only put my trust in *what* I now had, and perhaps it would already be influential enough to instruct me how to test it. It was time for a little self-exhortation. "I am straight — " I said to myself, "*very* straight." And I am strong, perhaps not *very,* but ... quite? I feel certain that I am about to be — whatever it is that I am about to be.

After a few round-rubbings of this, I looked down at myself and found I had indeed worked up a glow. Why, I had no idea, I thought self-admiringly, that I was so hot-threaded! I must be getting pinker-blooded all the time. And though by now somewhat winded, and though it was well past the hour for my midday inflation, without pausing to so refresh myself, I went on, conjuring my image. "I am — whatever it is that carries its own weight, stands fast, and talks short. I

intend to fight for my rites, I am a being of few words. Or as soon as I get over my initiation, I intend to be. I intend to act. And there isn't a curve in my body!"

This last wasn't true, of course; indeed, quite a large part of my statement was couched in words which were unfamiliar to me, but certainly must have swum up out of my own innerstink. But, if I were ever really to get over being an ellipse — that carefulest of beings bogged in the middle-mean — this was all part of it. "This is all part of it!" I almost shouted. Yes, I almost shouted. Up to then, you must understand, I had spoken only by means of an all-over surface vibration, but now this appeared to have localised itself somewhere above my diameter, narrowing its timbre but widening its volume. That I not only had a voice, but that its first real utterance was almost a shout, was not this enormously encouraging to what I had in mind?

And just then — I fell back, exhausted. Indeed, miserable to report, I fell back so thoroughly that I found myself far beyond my former angle, far gone past even an acute case of it — in fact, I was pure horizontal.

Now, ellipses, like the horses I had seen in some of the photostats, never lie down in this position; unlike you, they are never even caught dead in it. Pride goeth, I thought, lying there. How it would have alleviated my misery to know all the positions you are really capable of — that this was all part of it too. But at the time, all I could find was a whisper in which to excuse myself to my image. "It's because I don't know my own strength as yet," I said. Don't say *as yet,* came the caution. I spoke up, still with a sigh. "Rather, I am simply a being who doesn't know its own strength." When there was no reply, I took that to mean that I might continue in this vein. "Probably, I am a creature of such strength that it would be dangerous for me not to know the limits of it." Silence. "Maybe I ought to test my strengthhood, not for itself, but for the sake of the weaklings I will surely encounter." Quite a pause after this one, too. So at last I dared to say it. "Try me. What *is* the test for what I believe to be my — " But since I wasn't really sure whether it was character or gender I was applying for, I simply shouted again, this time, "Try me. *You just try!*" And found myself miraculously on my feet — that is, vertical — once more.

And not only that — even braver. I went round the room, and anywhere I met myself in the glass, which was everywhere, I said to it, "Come on now, think you know the test, huh; come on now, brother!" Brother. Where does one get those ideas? But when the answer came it was right from my authority in the glass there. It was only a whisper, quietly-firmly, as such answers should come, but I heard it. "Want to *step outside?* I dare you. Why don't you step outside, *and just see*?"

And since my intended being was not one to refuse a dare, that was what I prepared to do. Greenhorn that I was, I even gathered up almost all my energy, under the impression that what had carried me afield and over the great transparencies would more than easy fade me through a wall. There was a door in the wall, a large, regally obvious one of about ten feet in height, but of course, as far as doors were concerned and staircases, too, or any of those playthings which cater to the appendages, I was an aristocrat and had never used one in my life, the same being true of my manner of dealing with obstacles, it never having occurred to me to go over or around one, instead of *through*. So I gathered myself for the elide, took a last look at my image — never pinker, never prouder — said jauntily, "I'll meet *you* outside!" touched the proper thought, and — WHAM.

How I lived to tell this tale must after all be some sort of durility test — I must have ricocheted from surface to surface, up, down and sideways, fully thirteen times, being saved only by the dimensions of the room, just big enough to permit me the barest air-interval of relief, between making connections. During which, as with your drowners here, much passed before me. I comprehended how thoroughly I had gone against everything my mentors had been at such pains to teach me — against all the friction, weightfulness and lethargy it had taken me months to acquire. Above all — and as if I had never heard of catechisms — I had totally forgotten how much more Here I now was than There. Only let me get through this, I prayed, I promised, and I'll never again forget the distance between a floor and a ceiling. And it's true. I've never had to stop to puzzle over that later; there's something to be said for the school of hard knocks. Then at last, I once again lay prone.

And so bruised was I in my humilities, that I made no effort to get up. Instead, I did what any One wounded in his veils does, I lay there dreaming, in repair ...

For what an exquisite relief it could be, this lying prone! Especially must it be regarded here, I mused, as that dear posture in which one smiles backward at the anxieties of yesterday, lulla-lulla, and can perhaps even anticipate a change of shape one might just have the luck to earn or fall into, on the morrow. Above me, on the shelves, were the picture books of all the fauna here down the geological ages, those great plates I had so pored over during my early incubation here, wondering which of those shapes would turn out to be Yours — and in time, in the foolness of time, perhaps Mine. Although at that period I had been unable to focus on the print of the descriptions, each large plate was accompanied by enough small ones to give me a fairly canny idea of each creature's habits, habitats and

foods. Nothing gave any suggestion that all these magnificoes — I had after a few days persuaded myself not to regard them as terrors — did not exist simultaneously, our Now being so different from your little 'now'. My real shock at the sight of all this — all these waving waterfalls of mane, saurian extensions, anthropoid pugs, rhinoish craters and cattish patterns under which the pure oval had forever vanished — was not so much at the extremity of the exaggerations, as after a while an intense irritation, then a degrading melancholia, over the piffling scope of my own. How wee, shrunken and ignominous those defamatory little sins-against-the-curve such as I had been able to imagine. In the face of this grandeur, I was scarcely a pervert at all.

Once I had got over this, I had to buckle down to an important question: when presented a choice of all this imperial grab bag, which shape would I choose to become? Try as I did, I could raise no enthusiasm to be any of these creatures, much less that lyric rush of self-discovery which had been the lecher-hope of my small dreams. But the primer had certainly promised a change. For hours I pored over the herbivores and the carnivores, unable to decide between them, or to come to any conclusion other than that, if it were left to me, I should fancy a little fur. In the intervals, I searched in vain for pictures of that Lava-stream which must produce them, but although I kept forever coming upon mountains which almost lifted themselves from the page, and vegetation-rimmed tarns of a certain mystery, there seemed to be nothing akin to Our all-embracing system, and not much coherence that I could descry, to any. There was a day when, suddenly noticing a preponderance of eggs, I brooded over this at first wistfully, then almost angrily — they had promised more of a change than *this*. I had no choice really but to trust them.

So, when the dialogues started, I kept my own counsel, in time came to understand my delusion, and began to be taught my real profit. The shape I would sin under was not going to be left up to me; this they call resignation. Almost as with us, except for that subdivision which was still to be understood, there was One creature here only. And as I lay there now, I practiced ever newer dreams of this being, manufactured out of fresher, more sophisticated dissatisfactions — give or take a tusk or two, subtract a horn there. And after an hour or two of this pleasantest of siesta occupations, I made an accordingly new discovery. Posture! Perhaps only a One of an essentially gyroscopic people, used to the luxury of moving pavements in which trolley grooves We may incline all at the same comfortable angle, can appreciate how basic is posture here to the rhythms of philosophy, and indeed to the practice of ideals. How sensitively I was getting to understand you. It was not wholly comfortable then, to lie too long prone.

And no sooner had I discovered this, than I felt myself pulled powerfully upright, as eager for action as if I had just bounded out of the crater. At home, my line of action would have been ready for me; here it took only nominally longer for posture to suggest one. Carefully, very carefully this time, I approached the door. At this point in my education I had never really seen one up close; what has instantaneity to do with doors? Answer: it learns to reason itself through them, just as you, by reverse process, will soon find yourselves flashily able to do forever without them. At a certain distance, I found that, even when thinking the most lethargic thoughts and overcasting myself with the heaviest feelings I yet knew, there was still an unnatural tension between door and me, which boded ill. Then suddenly the source of it occurred to me; my electrical field was being opposed by another. Even their doors wear them, I thought. And perhaps not only their doors, perhaps all other objects which might offer resistance of any kind are required to be clothed so, while they themselves walk nakedly proudly among these obeisant; what aristocrats they are! And I — ?

And I. When Here, do as Here does. But be sure to emulate those who are in power. I must run no risk of having them confuse me with low-grade matter. It requires only a particular thought for us to discard our Field, the trouble being only that it is such a particular one, and illegal too. Perhaps it wouldn't work as well here. Taking a cautious breath, I found that since the last time I had practiced this heresy, the wholesomely coarse air of Yours had so clogged the finer pores that I was enabled to sustain a thought without fairly recognising that I was doing it — and that this furthermore seemed to add substantially to my weight. Sure enough, shortly I began to feel the familiar chilliness which always comes of lowering one's protective field, and happening to shiver, this inched me slightly doorwards — and sure enough, the door inched slowly and equally toward me. Some thoughts must be illegal anywhere. For good measure, I made so bold as to half hum it, meanwhile keeping my real thoughts trolleying along a loftier neighbourhood; there's always some niche of the intelligence that one must keep to oneself.

"I am ... " I murmured," ... I am ... an Original." This time the door didn't budge. But by dint of trial I found that as I moved forward, and only under the influence of this, the door would move compatibly outward. What courtesy, even in inferior matter, here! Slowly, majestically dipping my angle at a nice compromise between a taking-this-for-granted and a thank-you, I inched myself along without accident, until the door and I were in equipoise. I was almost outside it. Outside, on Here.

By hook or crook then, I was almost safely through the second

phase of my journey. For, awesome as the interstellar reaches may be to the lone traveler, or even to the caravan which must track those Saharas of cosmic dust, there had come a point in my journey when it was the destination which became the dread. Did they really have water in a liquid state? I could not survive without it. Should I have trusted them, when they reported themselves as beings with the same needs as I, molded by the same natural forces? Not that I was suspicious of their intent — but after all, they were only a third-generation star. Young as they were, must one not have a low view of intellectual powers which had taken all of their history to discover other presences, and the possible pulsings between them? Granted We and They had mutually significant symbols and meanings, but imagine Our dismay when informed that they still read and wrote! Could beings like Us, who are in Ourselves practically *all* electronic meaning, go backward as far as these beings on the other side of their 'Milky Way' thought they had gone forward; could we mutate enough, and quickly so, to touch arc on their planet? To dare to do this, I had gone against all home Opinion. And so far, with the help of arrangements-in-waiting, plans had gone remarkably. But, as I peered outside that glass door, I remembered my misgivings just a few moments before landing. Behind me, improbably far along the empyrean reaches, Ours, that long teardrop of a planet, lay somewhere shrouded as I had last seen it, nestling deep in its filtered atmospheres, a jewel once upon a time massively wept. As I had reined in on Yours, a mere toy ball lost on its cloud stubble, waiting to be picked up again in play — my last thought had been: yes, I can land Here — but can I live?

Such thoughts as one can have behind a door here! Just beyond the threshold the air was heavy, but I reminded myself now much I myself had changed during my weeks here. When, by infinite creepings I found myself still alive and breathing, no more WHAM's and the door still courteous, I made the last inch or two; behind me, the door modestly retired — and shut. I had no thought at the time of whether it would readmit me, or where I was going. All the prospect of your world was before me terminated in the distance — according to the limits of sight here, to which mine was fast declining — by a pergola. I remained for some minutes as I was, faintly chilly, daring nothing, taking stock. I was Here. I was Outside. And I was naked as the day Yours are born ...

Can you take *another word? Two, really:* criticism *and* category. *They are why you probably never heard of* Ellipsia *before. Critics like categories. Some critical categories are: Pop, science fiction,* avant-garde, *mainstream, black humour. Hortense Calisher has a distinctive reputation as a mainstream writer — sub-category, female, One critic found the book*

wanting in a survey of Ladies' Novels; another put it down as inadequate neo-Joyce; one who did not *review it thought it could have been an* avant-garde *hit if someone like William Burroughs had written it. S-f critics, who would have loved it, never saw it. The category it actually fits had not yet been invented.*

I must admit that my enthusiasm for fabulation *as a term is rather greater than for* The Fabulators *as a book. Prof. Scholes grants at the outset that his survey is not inclusive. He concentrates on Durrell, Vonnegut, Southern, Hawkes, Murdoch and Barth, and at least mentions Nabokov, Heller, Beckett, Donleavy, Purdy, and Friedman. One is of course less than startled to find he knows nothing of writers like Sturgeon, Ballard, Leiber, and Cordwainer Smith (let alone Disch, Delany, Zelazny); but it* is *surprising to find no mention of Calisher, Updike, or Burroughs, for instance — and downright painful not to find Borges or I. B. Singer anywhere.*

Nevertheless: —

The shoe fits, and baby needs *shoes. The need for such a category for critical straphangers is urgent, because* fabulation is *the future of the (published) fiction form. In spite of his hot/cool hashup, McLuhan's point about TV-viewers' participation-involvement vs. book-readers' detachment is both accurate and important. The printed page will never again be able to compete with the screen for realistic storytelling; but it will take an as yet undiscovered technique to make the tube into a suitable medium for satire, fable, or allegory — all of which require an audience suspended at that precise focal point which provides optimum discernment of the essential interplay between figure and background.*

The new facts of technological life can be taken as an invitation to abdication of all responsibility by the writer. Or he can utilise the new insights into the nature of (both new and old) technologies to add power and scope to his techniques for the transmission of those messages which are, by their own nature, *better conveyed through the slower, cooler, medium of words on paper.*

An Ornament to his Profession
Charles L. Harness

The world has different owners at sunrise ... Even your own garden does not belong to you.
— Anne Lindbergh

Conrad Patrick reached over and shut off the alarm. The dream of soft flesh and dark hair faded into six o'clock of a Friday morning. Patrick lay there a moment, pushing Lilas out of his thoughts, keeping his mind dark with the room, his body numb.

To move was to accept wakefulness, and this was unthinkable, for wakefulness must lead to knowledge, and then the problem barbs would begin to do their ulcerous work in his brain. They would begin, one by one, until all were in hideous clamour. None of them seemed ever to get really solved, and getting rid of one didn't necessarily mean he had solved it. More often, getting rid of it just meant he had found some sort of neutralising paralysis, or that he had once more increased his pain threshold.

Patrick got up heavily, found his robe and slippers, and stumbled into the bathroom, where he turned on the light and surveyed his face with overt distaste. It was a heavy, fleshy face, and the red hair and mustache were awry. He was not exactly thin, but not really fat, either. His cheeks and stomach showed the effects of myriad beers in convivial company. He considered these beers, these cheerful hours, one by one, going back, in a mirrored moment of wonder and gratitude. He considered what life would have been like without them, and as the realisation hit, his forehead creased uneasily. He scowled, dashed water over his eyes, and reached for a towel.

"Patrick," he muttered to himself in the mirror, "it's Friday. Another day has begun, and still the Company hasn't found you out."

Patrick no longer knew exactly what he meant by this routine, which he had started some years before, when he was the newest chemical patent attorney with Hope Chemicals. He had first been a chemist, but not a very good one, and then, after he and Lilas had got married, he had gone to law school at night. After he got his LLB he had discovered, with more fatalism than dismay, that he was not a very good lawyer, either. Yet, all was by no means lost. He was accepted by Hope's Patent Department. And not just barely accepted;

he was accepted as an excellent chemical patent attorney. He found this incredible, but he did not fight it. And finally, he deliberately masked his supposed deficiencies; when he was in the company of chemists, he spoke as a lawyer, and when with lawyers, he was a chemist. And when with the chemical patent lawyers, he didn't mind being just a fifty-fifty chemist-lawyer. They had his problem, too, It was like group therapy. Patent lawyers had a profound sympathy for each other.

From the beginning he had thrown himself into his work with zest. And now, with Lilas and the baby gone, his work was not just an opiate; it was a dire necessity.

He got the kettle boiling in the kitchen. There was now a pink glow in the east. He looked out the kitchen window and almost smiled. It was going to be a beautiful morning. He made the coffee quickly, four spoons of coffee powder in his pint mug, took the first bitter, exhilarating sip, tightened his robe about him, stepped out the kitchen door, and padded off down the garden path, holding his coffee mug carefully.

This again, was all part of his morning routine. Today, of course, there was a special reason. Theoretically the house and grounds were ready and waiting for the little party tonight, but it would do no harm to take a look around, down by the pool.

The flagstone path lay down a grassy slope, and was lined with azaleas. He and Lilas had put them in together. At the foot of the slope was a tiny stream, fed mostly by a spring half a mile away, on his neighbour's property. In this little stream Patrick had contrived a series of pools by dint of fieldstone and mortar, slapped together with such indolence into the stream side that the result was a pleasing but entirely accidental naturalness. These little pools were bordered with water cress, cat-o'-nine-tails, arrowhead, water iris, and lovely things with names he could no longer remember. He and Lilas had splurged one summer and bought all manner of water plants by mail. They had got very muddy planting them, and they had sorrowed over those that had died the next spring or that the baby had happily yanked. And then suddenly everything had begun to grow like weeds, and in a wild way, it was all very pretty.

The path along the stream led toward a grassy sward. Patrick stopped on the path a moment, and listened. Yes, there it was very faint, like a tinkling of tiny bells. He held his breath. Around the turn of the path, and so far invisible, was the bench. He and Lilas used to sit here, overlooking the lily pond. Only then, of course, it wasn't the lily pond, but the baby's wading pool. It was ... how long ago? ... that she had splashed in the pool and her baby delights had shattered the

garden peace. And that was what he heard now. And he could hear Lilas' answering laughter. This had happened to him on many past mornings. To him, it was not a conjured thing; it was faint, very far away, but it was real.

He began to walk again, and rounded the bend in the path. But as soon as the pool and the bench came in view, the sounds stopped abruptly. He had tried to deal with the phenomenon logically. This led him to various alternative conclusions, neither of which he completely disbelieved: (a) he was subject to hallucinations; (b) Lilas and the baby were really there.

Patrick sighed and looked about him. Here, all within a few steps of each other, were the lily pool, the benches, the outdoor grill, and the arbour. The arbour was a simple structure, framed with two-by-fours, bordered with lilacs that had never bloomed, and which enclosed his 'work table'. This was a stone-stepped table with a drawer, which contained writing materials and a few scribbled pages.

He looked into the arbour. From somewhere up in the ceiling of honeysuckle there was a flutter of wings. Sparrows. The 'room' seemed to concentrate the odour of grass clippings, fresh from yesterday's mowing. Patrick glanced over at the stone table, and permitted himself the habitual morning question: Would he have a few moments to work on his article? This was followed by a prompt companion thought. He was being stupid even to think about it. In three years he had not even finished the first chapter. And already the Court of Customs and Patent Appeals had wrought far-reaching revisions in the law of prior printed publication. Maybe he should pick another subject. An article he could do quickly, get into print quickly, before the Court could hand down a modifying decision. Somehow, there must be a way to get this thing off dead centre. A top-flight professional in any field ought to publish. Not that he was really that good. Still, as Francis Bacon had said, a man owed a debt to his profession.

He opened the drawer and pulled out the sheaf of papers. But he knew that he wasn't going to work on it this morning. A breeze fluttered the sheets. His eye cast about for a paperweight and found the candle-bottle; a stub of candle sticking in the neck of a wine bottle, used when he sat here at night and did not want to use the floodlights. He put the bottle on the papers.

Glumly he accepted his first inadequacy of the day. No use trying to hold the others back. The line forms to the right. The magic was gone from the morning; so be it. Let them come. He finished off his coffee. In his own garden he was a match for all of them. He felt girded and armoured.

They came.

One. His department was about to lose a secretary — Sullivan's Miss Willow. He hadn't told Sullivan. But maybe Sullivan knew already. Maybe even Miss Willow knew. These things always seemed to get around. He didn't mind interdepartmental promotions for the girls. He'd used it himself on occasion. But he didn't like the way Harvey Jayne was using company personnel policy to pressure him. And right now was a bad time to lose a secretary, with all those Neol cases to get out. As an army travels on its stomach, so his Patent Department traveled on its typewriters, or, more exactly, on the flying fingers of its stenographers as applied to the keys of those typewriters, 'thereby to produce', as they say in patentese, a daily avalanche of specifications, amendments, appeals, contracts, and opinions.

He halfway saw an angle here. Maybe he could boomerang the whole thing back on Harvey Jayne. Have to be careful, though, Jayne was a vice-president.

Two, and getting worse. Jayne wanted publication clearance for the 'Neol Technical Manual', and he wanted it today. It had to be cleared for legal form, proofread, and back to the printers tonight, because bright and early Monday morning twenty-five crisp and shining copies, smelling beautifully of printer's ink, had to be on that big table in the Directors' Room. Monday, the Board was going to vote on whether the company would build a six-million-dollar Neol plant.

Three, and still worse. John Fast, Neol pilot plant manager, wanted the Patent Department to write a very special contract. Consideration, soul of the party of the first part, in return for, inter alia, guarantee of success with Neol. It was impossible, and there was something horrid and sick in it, and yet Patrick was having the contract written by Sullivan, his contract expert, and in fact the first draft should be ready this morning. He was *not* going to refer Fast to the company psychiatrist. At least not yet. Maybe in two or three weeks, after Fast was through helping Sullivan get those new Neol cases on file in the Patent Office, he might casually mention this situation to the psychiatrist. Why did it always happen this way? Nobody could just go quietly insane without involving him. Forever and ever people like John Fast sought him out, involved him, and laid their madness upon him, like a becoming mantle.

Fourth, and absolutely and unendurably the worst. The patent structure for the whole Neol process was in jeopardy. The basic patent application, bought by the company from an 'outside' inventor two years before, was now known to Patrick, and to several of the senior attorneys in his department, to be a phony, a hoax, a thing discovered to have been created in ghastly jest — by a man in his own department. This was the thing that really got him. He could think of nothing, no way to deal with it. The jester, Paul Bleeker, was the son

of Andy Bleeker, his old boss and good friend. (Did anybody have any real friends at this crazy place any more?) And that was really why he had come up with an answer. It would kill Andy if this got out. Certainly, he and both Bleekers would probably have to resign. After that there would come the slow, crushing hearings of the Committee on Disbarment.

Problems.

Was this why he couldn't write, why he couldn't even get started? He blinked, shook his head. Only then did he realise that he was still staring, unseeing, at the handwritten notes in front of him.

He leafed slowly through the scribblings. How long ago had he started the article? Months? Nearly three years ago, in fact. He had wanted to do something comprehensive, to attain some small measure of fame. This was the real reason lawyers wrote. Or was it? Some time soon, he'd have to re-examine this thing, lay bare his real motives. It was just barely conceivable it would be something quite unpleasant. He gave a last morose look at the title page, 'The College Thesis as Prior Art in Chemical Patent Interferences' and put the papers back in the envelope. He just didn't know how to put this thing back on the rails. Fundamentally he must be just plain lazy.

But time was wasting. He looked at his wristwatch, put the papers back, closed the drawer, and walked out to the lily pond again.

It was in the same wet sparkle of sunlight that he remembered his baby daughter, splashing in naked glee that warm summer day so many months ago. Lilas had stood there and called the baby out of the pool to get dressed, for that fatal Saturday afternoon trip to the shopping centre. And his daughter had climbed out of the pool, ignored the tiny terry cloth, robe, and dashed dripping wet into her father's arms. At least her front got dried as he held her writhing wetness against his shirt, patting her dancing little bottom with the palm of his hand.

Slowly he sat down again. It must have been that sunbeam on the pool. It was going to be bad. He began to shudder. He wanted to scream. He bent over and buried his face in his hands. For a time he breathed in noisy rasps. Finally he stood up again, wiped his gray face on the sleeve of his robe, and started back up the garden path to the house. He would have to be on his way to the office. As soon as he got to the office, he would be all right.

'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays ...
— Omar Khayyam

Patrick sometimes had the impression that he was just a pawn on Alec Cord's chessboard. Cord was always looking seven moves deep, and into a dozen alternate sequences. Patrick sighed. He had long suspected that they were all smarter than he was, certainly each doing his job better than Patrick could do it. It was only the trainees that he could really teach anything any more, and even here he had to fight to find the time. Nothing about it made sense. The higher you rose in the company, the less you knew about anything, and the more you had to rely on the facts and appraisals developed by people under you. They could make a better patent search than he; they could write a better patent specification, and do it faster; they could draft better and more comprehensive infringement opinions. In a gloomy moment he had wondered whether it was the same way throughout the company, and if so, why had the company nevertheless grown into the Big Ten of the American chemical industry. But he never figured it out.

He looked up at his lieutenant. "I understand it was the crucial game, in the last round. If you beat Gadsen, you won the tournament, and if he beat you, he won."

"Didn't realise you followed the sports page, Con," said Alec Cord.

"Gadsen had white, and opened with the Ruy Lopez. You defended with Marshall's Counter Gambit. They gave the score in the paper. Somebody said it was identical, move for move, with a game between Marshall and Capablanca, in 1918, when Marshall first pulled his gambit on Capablanca."

"I wouldn't know."

"That's a surprise. They say you even had an article in *Chess Review* last year on the Marshall Counter Gambit."

Cord was silent. Patrick took a new tack. "Gadsen's that Examiner in Group 170, the one handling your Neol cases?"

"That's right."

"Including the basic case, the one we know now is the phony? The one our whole Neol plant depends on?"

"The very one."

"The one you would have given just about anything, even the Annual D.C. Chess Tournament, for Gadsen to allow?"

"All right, Con. But it's not what you think. I didn't throw the tournament. And Gadsen didn't throw the allowance. We didn't discuss it at all. I admit I let him win that game, but there wasn't any deal. It would have to occur to him, with no help from me, that there was something he owed me. He could have done it either way, and I'd have had no kick. Maybe he'd have given the allowance anyhow. In fact, for all you know, maybe he allowed the case despite the game, and not because of it."

"I won't argue the point, Alec. We may never know. Anyhow, the

thing I came to see you about is this." He handed the other a legal-size sheet.

Cord's eyes widened. "An interference!"

"So maybe Gadsen allowed the claims just to set you up for an interference."

"Maybe. But not likely. If he were going to do that, he would have just sent the interference notice, this thing, without the allowance."

"Any ideas who the other party is?"

"Probably Du Santo. We've been picking up their foreign patents in the quick-issue countries, like Belgium. We'll know for sure after the inventors file their preliminary statements. Which brings me to the next question: How can we file a preliminary statement sworn to by a phony inventor who doesn't even exist?"

"I don't know. I want you to figure out something after we talk to Paul Bleeker."

"Take it from the beginning, Paul," said Patrick.

Paul Bleeker's face rippled with misery.

Cord said: "Maybe I'd better go."

"Stay put," said Patrick shortly. "Paul, you understand why we have to have Alec in on this. You're emotionally involved. You might not be able to do what has to be done. Alec has to listen to everything, so he and I together can plan what to do. You trust him, don't you?"

The young man nodded.

"It began as sort of a joke ... ?" prompted Patrick.

"Yes, a joke," said Paul. "When I was a freshman in law school. Harvey Jayne and those others were teasing Dad. That was when Dad was still Director of the Research Division, before they promoted him."

The light was dawning. Patrick sat up. "They were teasing him about the Research Division?"

"Yes, then Mr. Jayne said Dad's Research Division was essential, but only to verify outside inventions he bought."

"So you decided to booby trap Mr. Jayne?"

"Yes."

"You then wrote those patent attorneys in Washington?"

"Yes, I mailed them the examples for the patent application. They took them and changed them around a little bit, the same way we do here in the Patent Department. They added the standard gobbledygook at the front, and eight or ten claims at the back. They sent the final draft back to me for execution. The standard procedure. They sent me a bill for three hundred dollars. I paid that out of the money Mr. Jayne sent them, when he bought the invention. I still have the rest — four thousand and seven hundred dollars. I haven't spent any of it." He looked uncertainly at Patrick. "You won't tell Dad

about this, will you?"

"Certainly not." Patrick looked at him with genuine curiosity. "But how were you able to make the oath? What notary would notarise the signature of 'Percy B. Shelley'?"

"Absolutely any, Con. They all just assume you are who you say you are, so long as you pay the fee."

Patrick was momentarily shaken. "But that's the whole idea of notarising, to make the inventor swear he's truly the inventor, the person named in the oath."

Cord smiled faintly. "Not all notaries waive identification, Con."

"Well," said Patrick, "now we've committed perjury, sworn falsely to the United States Patent Office. So far, all they can do to you, Paul, besides disbarring you, followed by imprisonment in the Federal Penitentiary, is to strike your Shelley case from the files in the Patent Office."

The young man was silent.

Cord said: "Harvey Jayne bought the patent application only after he knew it worked. The whole thing depended on whether John Fast could reproduce it in the lab. Paul, how could you be so sure it would work?"

"If John did it right, it couldn't *not* work. I copied the examples right out of something in the library. Somebody's college thesis."

Patrick brightened. "Alec?"

Cord shook his head. "Nothing like that ever turned up in our literature searches. We hit the Dissertation Abstracts, all the way back to the beginning."

Patrick turned back to Paul Bleeker. "You'll have to tell us more about this thesis. What was the name of the student? We'd also like the name of the university, and the year. In fact, anything and everything you can remember."

"All I can remember is these runs, tucked away in the back pages. They didn't really seem pertinent to the main body of the thesis. Other than that, I can't remember anything."

"You must have seen the title page," pressed Patrick.

"I guess so."

"You could identify it if you saw the thesis again?"

"Sure, but it's gone."

"Gone?"

"The library just had it on loan. They have hundreds come in, this way. Our people keep them a while, then send them back. You know the procedure."

"There must be some record."

Cord shook his head. "We've checked all the inter-library loans for the past five years. We found nothing. If Paul's memory is correct on

the facts, that it *was* within the last five years, and the library *did* have it on loan, we are led to the conclusion that the thesis was done by somebody here at Hope, and lent on a personal basis to the library, without any formal record."

Patrick groaned. "Our own inventor, here all the time? That's all we need. He'll scream. He'll take it to court. We've got to find him first, before he finds us." He turned to Cord. "Alec, add it all up for us, will you?"

"It admits of precise calculation," said Cord, "in the manner of a chess combination. There are two primary variations. Each of these has several main subvariations. None of them is really difficult. The only problem is to recognise that our tactics are absolutely controlled, move by move, by events as they develop."

Patrick raised his hand. "Not so fast. Let's take the main angles. The primary variations."

"First primary. We do nothing. If we're senior party in the interference, this means we take no testimony, but rely purely on our filing date. Chances: better than even. If we're junior party, we lose hands down.

"Second primary. We fight. Firstly, this gives subvariant A. With Paul's help we find the real inventor. We buy his invention from him, and, if he hasn't already published, we file a good and true application for him. We enter a motion, to substitute the new case for Paul's case, and then we expressly abandon Paul's case. If this inventor actually has published in the way Paul remembers, this gives subvariant B. We find that thesis, then we move to dissolve the interference, contending that the sole count is unpatentable over the disclosures in the thesis."

Patrick twisted his mustache nervously. "However you state it, we wind up with no chance of a patent. Maybe we can live with that. Perhaps we can forego a patent-based monopoly. But there's one thing we *must* have — and that's the right to build the plant, free and clear from interference or infringement of anybody else's patent. Can we tell the Board we have that right? The Board wants to know. They're going to vote on it Monday. And I don't think we can tell them anything ... not yet. The economics and market are there. Everything hangs on the patent situation. Bleeker says the vote will be to build, if the patent picture is clear. We're holding the whole thing up in our shop right here." He turned back to Cord. "Alec, take it from the college thesis. Run the variations off from that."

"Variation One," said Cord, "the thesis is a good reference. This means it adequately describes the invention, that it was at least typewritten, that it was placed on the shelves at the University Library, available to all who might ask for it, and that all of this was

done more than one year before either Paul or his opponent filed their respective cases. This would support the motion to dissolve. Both parties would lose, and neither would get a patent, fraudulent or otherwise. With no basic patent to be infringed, it follows that anybody could build a Neol plant. Paul's application would be given a prompt final rejection and would be transferred to the abandoned files in the Patent Office. Then it would lie buried until destroyed under the twenty-year rule. Nobody would ever learn about it.

"Variation Two. The thesis for some reason is not citable as a good, sufficient, and competent reference under the Patent Office rules. For example, we might not find it in time, or if we do find it, it might really present substantial differences from Paul's disclosure. Even if we are senior party, we will not be able to negotiate a settlement of the interference without grave danger of discovery of what Paul did. If we turn out to be junior party, it's even more certain we can't settle the interference, but there's actually less risk of being found out, if only because the opposition won't talk to us."

Patrick's mouth dropped. "All right. We always come back to the thesis. We've got to find it. If we find it, we can build a Neol plant. If we can't find it, we can't build a plant, and even worse things will probably happen to a number of people in this company." He turned to Cord. "Have you and Paul exhausted every possibility, every lead?"

Cord nodded glumly. Paul Bleeker bent over and put his face in his hands.

Patrick sighed. He thought, "I'll have to do it the hard way. Tonight." He said, "Paul, you'll be over tonight, won't you?"

"Yes, Con."

"Thanks, fellows. Paul, would you ask Sullivan to come in?"

> *He must needes goe whom the devill doth drive.*
> — John Heywood

Patrick smiled at Sullivan. "Good morning, Mike. How are those Neol cases coming?"

"We're in good shape. John Fast and I will need a couple of more weeks, though. It's a whole series of cases. Covers the catalysts, the whole pilot-plant set up, the vapor phase job, everything. John and I get together every morning and dictate this stuff to Willow. She types her notes in the afternoon. Except that as of now she's about a week behind in transcription. If she left right now, the Neol patent cases would be in quite a hole."

Patrick met Sullivan's studied gaze noncommittally. *He knows,* he thought. *They all know about Willow.* He said easily, "I guess you're

right. How about John? Will he stick with your program?"

Sullivan shrugged his shoulders. "He'd better. We need him. But, like I said, he needs us, too. And he insisted that you approve the contract. Do you want to see it?"

Patrick shifted uncomfortably. "It's nearly ten o'clock. He'll be here in a minute. You can read it to both of us, then."

Sullivan smiled. "You're getting off easy."

Patrick said, "I know what you're thinking, Mike. And you're right. We *are* going to turn him over to the psychiatrist. But not just yet. Not until you get these last three Neol disclosures written up. Another couple of weeks won't hurt him."

Sullivan's smile deepened.

Patrick said, "Medically, it certainly can't hurt to humour him."

Sullivan laughed. "Con, you're a sham, a fraud, and a hypocrite. Preserve him long enough for him to file his cases, then let him drop dead."

Patrick bridled. "That's putting it a little strong. If I thought for a moment ... "

"Oh, come off it, Con. We're all on edge with this thing. Anyhow, you can take comfort in the thought that the Patent Department has simply ground out one more contract, one out of a hundred a year, doing their daily hacking, what they are paid to do, and therefore what they rejoice in doing. If you look at it that way, you have served your client to the very best of your ability, and at night you can sleep with sound conscience."

Patrick growled, "If I didn't need you — "

Sullivan held up his hand. "Speak of the devil — "

"Come in," called Patrick.

John Fast entered the room. He was an average looking man, average size, of an average grayness. His face was almost without expression, perhaps a little sad. There was something unnerving in his eyes. They were acquainted with — *Horror?* thought Patrick, wondering. No. That was too simple. John Fast was acquainted with the sub-elements of horror, with the building stones of terror, and with the unrest of darkness. And this was the man whom he would need tonight. "Hello, John," he said genially. "I hear your Neol cases are going a mile-a-minute."

"Going nicely, Con, thanks." Fast looked at Sullivan, then back at Patrick. "Is my contract ready?"

"Contract? Yes, of course, the contract. Mike and I have been going over it. Before we read it to you, though, we'd like to make sure we've covered everything. Now Mike here has heard your story, but I haven't. I'd like to hear it from you, straight, exactly the way it happened."

"It's a long story, Con."
"We've got lots of time."

"All right, then." Fast took a deep breath; his eyes grew distant. "I think it began with the ozonator. You know what ozone smells like? It's sharp, electric. In certain concentrations it's hard to distinguish from chlorine or sulfur dioxide. You know how the Bible talks about brimstone? Brimstone is sulfur, but there wasn't any sulfur in Palestine. The old prophets were just trying to identify an odour that was there long before they learned about sulfur. This creature moves in an atmosphere of ozone. He moves around in time and space, and to do this he applies an electrical field on the space-time continuum. Ozone is sort of a by-product, the same as when you run an electric motor. So this thing moves around in a fog of ozone. Not only that, ozone seems to attract him, the way nectar attracts bees.

"For a long time I didn't really realise he was around. And then last week I met him. It might have been an accident. But with all this Freudian theory, maybe there's no such thing as an accident. Maybe, on a subconscious level, I did it deliberately. Anyhow, you know we have a big structural formula of penta-cyclopropane drawn in white paint on the floor of the pilot plant. This makes a star, with the methylene groups as the five points. It is also a pentagram — a starlike geometric design used in certain ... rituals. Within the history of the United States, people have been burnt for making a pentagram. The stage was set. Just one more thing was needed: the Lord's Prayer recited backwards. This was provided. I'm a steady church-goer. Bible class on Sunday mornings. Last Sunday I took my office tape recorder to Bible class. Yes, we said the Lord's Prayer. It was still on the tape when I was going to dictate my monthly progress report. I rewound the tape, so there it was, everything going backwards on audio. I was inside the pentagram. And suddenly, there — it — was, on the other side. I was so scared I was petrified. I wasn't surprised. Just scared. Maybe that means I knew what I was doing. So we stared at each other. Except I wasn't sure what I was staring at. But it was definitely a shape, with arms, head, eyes ... "

"You were tired," said Patrick. "You know how fatigue can induce hallucinations."

"It's not that simple, Con. There — was — there *is* — something there, some kind of elemental force. It's a being, an intelligent being. And powerful, in strange ways. It can ... alter the laws of chemistry and physics. I got it to increase the yield of terpineol — 'Neol'. At first, by about ten per cent. Then another ten per cent. It was easy. And then last night we started up the pilot plant. We ran the C-10 through first, cold, just to flush the lines and check the flowmeters. We got the

ozonator tied in about midnight. Now you understand the ozone won't start reacting with the C-10 until you hit about one sixty F., and we'd planned to turn steam into the jacket after the ozone concentration had built up to about five per cent. But the reactor began to warm up. It hit one sixty in a matter of seconds. The two technicians on shift were scared. They ran over behind the explosion mat. I stayed put. I knew what was going on. *He* was doing it. I wanted to know how far he could push it. I shunted the C-10 through the flowmeter. I switched in the product receiver. It took about thirty minutes to feed one pound mole of C-10 ... exactly one hundred and thirty pounds. I shut everything off. I had been watching the product scales all along, so I knew what it was going to be. It was one hundred fifty-four pounds, one pound mole of Neol, exactly. Yield: one hundred per cent of theory.

"They came out from behind the mats, then. They looked at the graphs. Nobody believed the graphs. They looked for a weighing error. They knew it couldn't happen. So I told them to check the meters. The meters were all right. I knew there was nothing wrong with the meters. Then we started another run. The reaction didn't start cold this time. So we turned the steam into the jacket. That was supposed to start the reaction. We usually start getting terpineol in the receiver at about one sixty. We watched it for a good hour. Not a drop of product. Just C-10 going in, C-10 coming out. We couldn't explain it. We were making ozone. The ozonator was O.K. We had the right concentration of C-10, the right temperature, mole ratio, space velocity, everything was right. But not a gram of terpineol was coming out. *He* wanted to *show* me, you understand, that he could control it either way. But he was going to leave it up to me which way it went. I didn't want to decide right then. I didn't know what to do. Just then I didn't even know how I could tell him, if I did decide. So we simply shut down and knocked off.

"I went home, but I couldn't sleep. I tried to think it through. And I guess I did think it through. This *being* can put me through. With him on my side I can do anything. There's no position in this corporation I couldn't have. And *that* would just be a starter. I don't know where the end would be. So I want to make the deal. I know exactly what I want. And what *he* wants. He wants, well, he wants *me*. Not my body, really, or anything like that. It's more like something mental. He wants to take it from me a little at a time, like a parasitical drain. But it wouldn't affect me physically or mentally. In fact, I'd get sharper all the time. And whatever it is, it would go so slowly, day-by-day, that I wouldn't notice it. This goes on for years. I'll even have a normal life expectancy. When he's got all of it, I'll die. And that's the deal. The next thing is to get it down on paper. Something he and I can both

sign. A binding contract. It doesn't matter whether you believe he exists. Call him the Devil if you like. And call the thing I'm giving him, my soul. A lot of people who believe in God don't believe the Devil exists. And some of them don't believe in souls, either. Although, as I said, it isn't really that simple."

There was a long silence.

"The contract?" prompted Fast.

Patrick nodded, as in a dream, to Sullivan.

Sullivan began: "This Agreement, made as of this blank day of blank, in the year of our Lord — "

"Not 'of our Lord'," said Fast.

"Quite so," said Sullivan. "I'll fix that." He continued: " ... By and between John Fast, hereinafter sometimes referred to as 'Fast', and His Satanic Majesty, hereinafter sometimes referred to as 'The Devil', Witnesseth: Whereas Fast is desirous of certain improvements in his present circumstances; and Whereas The Devil is able to cause and bring about said improvements; now therefore, in consideration of the mutual promises herein contained, and for other good and valuable consideration, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, the parties agree as follows: Article One. The Devil shall promptly cause the Hope Chemical Company to erect a plant for the production of terpineol, hereinafter referred to as 'Neol', and to make Fast the manager thereof. The Devil shall, with all deliberate speed, cause Fast to become a world-famous chemist, rich, respected, and to win at least two Nobel prizes. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, The Devil will immediately enter upon the performance, and will continue same, for the full term of this Agreement, of every obligation set forth on Exhibit A, annexed hereto, and incorporated by reference herein."

Sullivan looked up at Fast. "You wrote out the list?"

"Right here."

"Mark it 'Exhibit A'," said Sullivan. He continued. "Article Two. Fast hereby assigns, grants, conveys, sets over, and transfers all his right, title, and interest in and to his soul, to the said Devil, on the death of Fast; provided, however, that Fast shall live until the age of seventy, and that during said period The Devil shall have met faithfully, and in a good and workmanlike manner, all his obligations, both general and specific, as above set forth."

Patrick nodded. "That's fine."

"We had to change some of our 'boiler-plate' clauses," said Sullivan. "Others we had to leave out altogether. For example, we thought it best to omit completely the 'Force Majeure' clause, whereby the Devil is relieved from his obligation to perform, if prevented by an

Act of God, but can nevertheless require you to perform, that is, give up your soul!"

"Logical," agreed Fast.

"And we had to change the 'construction and validity' clause. Ordinarily we provide that our contracts shall be construed, and their validity determined, under the laws of the State of New York. However, we think that under New York law the contract might be held invalid, as having an immoral object, and hence unenforceable by either side. So we changed it to Hawaiian law."

"Yes," said Fast. "It's all ready to sign, then?"

"Right there, there're lines for the signatures of both, ah, parties," said Sullivan. "Are we to understand, John, that the Devil will actually affix his signature to this document, in real pen and ink?"

"I sign in blood," said Fast calmly. "How *he* signs, I'm not really sure. All I know is, he'll do something, maybe make a special appearance, to let me know that he accepts."

"I see," said Patrick. (He saw nothing.) He asked curiously, "But why do you think you need the Devil? An energetic man with a solid technical background and a high I.Q. in a big, growing chemical company doesn't need assistance such as this."

Fast looked at him in surprise. "Coming from you, Con, that's a very strange question."

"How is that?"

"I accept aid from any source, because I am totally committed. But so are you, and therefore, you, too, will accept assistance without asking the cost, or to whom the payment will be made."

Patrick felt a flurry of confusion. "And to what am I totally committed?"

"To your patents. Did you not know?"

Patrick had to think about this. Finally, he shook his head, not in denial, but to admit incomprehension. "Well," he defended. "It's my job."

Fast's mouth, immobile and cryptic as the Mona Lisa's, seemed almost to smile. "Yes, but only because you have contracted for it. So you see, what I have done is not a particularly strange thing. You ... everyone ... has entered into his own private contract, with something. My only difference is that I have put mine in writing. This does not necessarily mean that I am more honest than you. Perhaps I am merely more perceptive."

"True, my deal is with the Devil. But is that immoral? Morality is relative. *My* action, *my* way of life, has to be evaluated against the background of *your* action, and *your* way of life. You think me immoral, if not insane. Yet you wrote this contract for me. Why? Because you want to keep me happy. And why do you want to keep

me happy? So that I'll keep your patents coming. Therefore you've made your own contract — with your patents. You resolve all questions of sin, virtue, and morality in light of the effect on your patents. With you, nothing can be sinful — even an assignment to hell — if it helps your terpineol patents. Before you judge my contract, take a look at your own."

Patrick stared at the gray man. Finally he smiled uneasily. "Whatever you say, John."

"And now I'll do *you* a favour, Con. Change the name."

"Change what name?"

"Neol. It's wrong."

"What's wrong with it?"

"The sound; wrong altogether. If you should ever have to ... call ... anyone with it, it wouldn't do it. Also, you ought to have five letters, exactly, one letter for each point of the pentagram. Correct symbology is essential."

"Whom would I be calling?" said Patrick. "And why?"

"You know ... for your patents."

Patrick looked blank, then frowned, then finally he smiled. "All right, John. Whether or not you're a mystic, I'll give you 'x-plus', for mystification."

After Fast had gone, Patrick and Sullivan stared at each other.

"Do *you* believe any of that?" said Patrick.

"I believe he *thinks* he saw something. A kind of self-hypnosis."

"How about the yield. You know one hundred per cent of theory is impossible."

"No, Con, I don't know that. And neither do you. Within experimental errors, he may well have got one hundred per cent. And even if he didn't, he really might have got fairly close to it. A pilot plant always does much better than a bench scale unit.

You just naturally expect the yield to be high. All the variables are optimised, easily controlled."

"So you think he just hypnotised himself into seeing the devil?"

"Why not? Actually, he's an accomplished amateur hypnotist. I'm told he is quite a parlour performer, if you can catch him."

"I know. He'll be at the party tonight, for something like that. But he's wrong about me. I'm *not* totally committed to my patents. It's my job, the same as it's your job. John Fast doesn't know what he's saying."

Sullivan's eyes twinkled wickedly. "You're absolutely right, Con. There are *some* things you would not resort to, even to save the Neol patent position. You would *not* sell your own grandmother into white slavery even if it would win the interference and solve the whole

problem." He paused, then added maliciously, "Would you, Con?"

Patrick snorted. "Don't tempt me!"

"Are you going to change the name?" asked Sullivan.

" 'Neol'?"

"You know what I mean."

"Well, maybe. There's nothing really wrong with 'Neol'."

"Except that John Fast thinks it's wrong."

" ... Without saying how to make it right," added Patrick. "I want to think about it. And I might change it, just to be ornery."

That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.
— Shakespeare

Patrick sat in his office, looking at the proofs of the 'Neol Technical Manual', and thinking hard. This was Harvey Jayne's Manual, and Jayne was trying to steal Miss Willow. But Jayne needed Patent Department clearance for his Manual. Right away, this suggested possibilities. This morning, he had it nearly figured. And then John Fast had decided the name was wrong. And what difference did it make to John Fast? He wasn't even going to ask, because tonight he was going to need the man.

But *could* he change the name? How sacred was this Manual to Jayne?

Patrick considered the matter.

He knew, certainly, that a technical manual prepared and published by an American chemical giant was like nothing else in the world of books. It was the strange child of the mating of the laboratory with Madison Avenue, midwifed by the corporate public relations committee. It told all. It was rich in history, process descriptions, flow sheets, rotogravures, chemical equations, and nomographs. It was comprehensive, and its back pages were filled with thousands of arrogant footnotes. The stockholders of Hope Chemical were given the impression that the sole function of the 'Neol Technical Manual' was to incite an unendurable craving for Neol in the hearts of purchasing agents throughout the country. But Patrick knew that the compiler privately harboured other motives. For that man, Harvey Jayne, it represented an opportunity for creativity that comes only when the company builds a new plant; it could not happen to Jayne twice in one lifetime.

In this manual, Harvey Jayne would have a ready-made solace for whatever disasters might lie ahead. His wife might on occasion fail to recognise his greatness; his son might fail in school; he might, alas,

even be laterally transferred within the company. Yet, withal, his faith in himself would be restored, and the blood brought back into his cheeks, when he gets out his old Technical Manual, to read a little in it, to fondle its worn covers, and to look at the pictures. So doing, Harvey Jayne might murmur, with tears in his eyes, as did Jonathan Swift, rereading 'Gulliver's Travels', "God, what genius!"

So, thought Patrick, this volume will be cherished forever by Harvey Jayne. He will keep it in his office bookcase, with a spare in his den at home. When he transfers, it will be carefully packed. Years later, for presentation at his retirement dinner, his lieutenants will borrow his last copy from his wife, or perhaps steal one from the company library. They will have it bound in the company colours, blue and gold; and the chairman of the board, the president, and numerous fellow vice-presidents will autograph its pages.

Now, brooded Patrick, the whole of this immense and immemorial undertaking, this monster, this Manual, centres around the product trademark, which is as essential to it as the proton to the atom, the protoplasmic nucleus to the growing cell. The Manual is known by this name. Once thus baptised, the name is sacred. And to deny this book its name, to suggest that its name is wrong, that it should have another name, is to invite the visitation of the Furies, for this is desecration, a charge so sinister that it must rank with defamation of motherhood, or with being against J. Edgar Hoover.

Yes, there were possibilities. For personal disaster. He could not change the name of the Manual. And yet he was going to. Why? he wondered. Why am I going to do this? I am as crocked as John Fast. His mind floundered, searching. I have to fight Harvey Jayne, that's why. No. That's not why. It's something else. John Fast said the name was wrong. The new name should have five letters. He tugged briefly at his mustache, then leaned over to the intercom.

> *Books cannot always please.*
> — George Crabbe

"Con," said Cord, "it's not really bad. A few editorial changes should do the job."

Patrick's face was a blank. "How about 'Neol'?"

"It's clear. The closest thing is 'Neolan', registered for textiles."

Patrick brightened. "Clear? It's a clear case of infringement!"

Cord stared at him. "What ... what did you say?"

"I said it infringes. And I hasten to add, Cord, my boy, that you look quite strange, with your mouth open." He reached for the phone and dialed Jayne.

"Oh, hi there, Harvey ... No, I didn't call to protest about Miss Willow. We're really grateful you can do something for her, Harvey. Her place is with you, Harvey. On one condition ... It's this, Harvey, that you double her raise. She's worth every bit of it. Good, Harvey, splendid you see it our way ... Tech Manual, Harvey? Yes, we're looking at it right now. No, Harvey, I'm afraid we can't do that. There's a very close prior registration that will probably kill Neol as a trademark. No, Harvey, please get that out of your head. Miss Willow has nothing to do with it. She will transfer with our very best wishes ... That is indeed your privilege, Harvey. If you want to present the Manual to the Board on Monday morning without Patent Department clearance, go right ahead. It would, of course, be my duty to give Andrew Bleeker a memo itemising my objections, absolving the Patent Department of all responsibility for the content of the Manual. There will be carbons, of course, to ... You will? Why that's fine, Harvey." He hung up. "He's coming over."

"I'm amazed," said Cord dryly.

"Keep your fingers crossed on Willow."

"But you said the louse could have her, with a double raise," said Cord.

"Alec, you wouldn't believe me if I told you what is about to happen. So I won't waste time. We have only a few minutes before Harvey is due to show. So — *Cord?*"

"Yes, Con?"

"I didn't address you. I merely stated your name. It turns crisply from the tongue, like honest bacon in the griddle. A fine name. Cord, Cord, Cord. A good word to say. Here, I'll write it, too. Flows easily on paper. Cord looks good. Listens good. Charming. A man's name is the best thing about him. Like Narcissus. Hello there, you beautiful name!"

Cord flushed red. "Con, for goodness' sake. It isn't at all remarkable!"

"Yes, my boy, it is ... to you." He leered at his lieutenant. "A man's name is his most enchanting possession. For you, for me, for Harvey Jayne, for anybody."

"So?"

"That's how we find a substitute for Neol. We will derive us a new word, from 'Jayne'. Harvey will find it irresistible. And it will be a good trademark. Think of the trouble American Cyanamid had, trying to find a trademark for their acrylic fiber. They finally named it after the project leader, Arthur Cresswell. They called it 'Creslan'. And Cluett-Peabody, naming their 'Sanforise' process for pre-shrunk fabric after the inventor, Sanford. And think of how many of Willard Dow's products are 'Dow' something or other, 'Dowicide', for example. And

look at Monsanto's 'Santowax', 'Santowhite', 'Santomerse'. And Du Pont's 'Duponol', and W. R. Grace's 'Grex' polyethylene. So we'll name our terpineol after Harvey Jayne. 'Jayne-ol'. Of course not exactly 'Jayne-ol'. We'll have to fix it so he won't recognise it. Some phonetic equivalent."

"He'll recognise it, Con. It'll just make him madder."

"No, I don't think he will. A man has a selfish complex on his own name. He loves it, and he doesn't want other people to have it. He has trouble remembering people who have similar names. So if we do this right, he won't recognise it when he hears it. It'll fascinate him, but he won't understand why. He'll approve it on the spot. But first, we'll have to work him over, soften him up a little. So listen carefully as to what you have to do."

"Harvey," said Patrick, "you're making us revise our company leaflet on trademarks."

"I didn't know you had one," said Harvey Jayne suspiciously.

"It lists everything that shouldn't be done — all possible errors. At least it *did*. Now, you've added a few more. We'll have to revise."

"This brochure. You wouldn't happen to have a copy — "

Patrick handed him the leaflet. "Brand-new edition, just off the press this afternoon."

Jayne read slowly. " 'The trademark should be capitalised, and preferably set in distinctive type. If the trademark is registered in the United States Patent Office, follow it with the registration symbol, ®. If no application for registration has been filed, or, if filed, not yet granted, then use an asterisk after the trademark, with footnote identification. Hope Chemical Company's trademark for ... '." He looked up. "I'm not sure I follow your reasoning on this particular point. For example, I didn't capitalise 'neol'. I don't care whether it's capitalised or not. And I didn't say 'trademark' every time I said 'neol'. I just said plain old neol. I want it to become so familiar to our customers that they'll think of it as a household word."

Patrick shook his head sadly. "Harvey, I understand your viewpoint, and I deeply sympathise. Such charity and philanthropy are all too infrequent in this hatchet-hearted corporation."

"Charity? Philanthropy?"

"Yes. Really touching. Gets me, *here."* Patrick struck his fist to his chest. "You want to give the trademark to the general public, including our competitors. Come one, come all, anybody can use this name, which isn't a trademark any more, because Harvey doesn't want it spelled with a capital."

"I don't see how spelling it lowercase prevents it from being a trademark."

"It converts it into the *thing itself*. Remember 'cellophane'? It used to be Du Pont's trademark for transparent wrappings, and it was spelled with a capital 'C'. And then it became so well known that the newspapers and magazines began spelling it lower case, and they never mentioned it was Du Pont's brand of anything, because everybody by that time thought of cellophane only as the transparent wrapping itself. It had become the common name of the thing itself: it had become *generic*. Now anybody can sell his own transparent wrapping and call it 'cellophane'. Cellophane has now joined the list of irresistible trademarks that are wide open to the public: shredded wheat, mineral oil, linoleum, escalator, aspirin, milk-of-magnesia."

"Anything else wrong?"

"Several other points. On the title page, you ought to say 'Copyright, Hope Chemical Company'."

"But how can I say 'Copyright' before we publish? I thought you just said you couldn't do that. You said we couldn't say Neol was registered."

"I won't try to explain it, Harvey. That's the way it has worked out historically."

"Anything else?"

"We don't like your trademark, 'Neol'," said Patrick. "We think it infringes at least one mark already registered. Besides which, it's a weak mark, made up of weak syllables."

"What ... what are you saying?" sputtered Jayne. "There's nothing wrong with 'Neol'. How can it be weak?"

"Look at it this way," said Patrick smoothly. "Fashions in trademarks come and go, like women's hats. At the moment, the ad people are conditioned to think in terms of certain well-worn prefixes and suffixes. The suffix is supposed to classify the product as a liquid, a solid, a plastic, a synthetic fiber, a flooring compound, soap, deodourant, toothpaste, and so on. True, they have their differences, but these are minuscule. The pack of them are so much alike you'd take them for a children's *a capella* choir."

"That's probably true for most trademarks," said Harvey Jayne smugly, "but not for 'Neol'. 'Neol' was selected by our computer, which was programmed to synthesise words from certain mellifluous-sounding syllables, and to discard everything harsh. And not only that, but to present a final list of one hundred names graded according to final audial acceptance. 'Neol' headed the list."

Patrick shook his head pityingly. "Look, Harvey, when you use a computer, you've got two-and-a-half strikes against you from the start. In the first place, the only marks the computer can grind out will be made up of these forbidden syllables we've already ruled out. And

secondly, no computer can zero in on the gray area between the legally acceptable 'suggestive' marks and the legally unacceptable 'descriptive' marks. Even the courts have a hard time with this concept. To demonstrate this, we are going to decomputerise 'Neol' for you."

"De ... computerise ... ?"

"Yes, our decomputer takes a computerised trademark and tells us whether it's too close to known marks or names to be registrable."

"May I see it, this decomputer?"

"You could, but that won't be necessary. It's so simple, I'll just describe it to you briefly. It consists of two cylinders, rotating on the same shaft, one next to the other. On the left cylinder we have prefixes; on the right, suffixes. All our syllables were compiled from trademarks in the chemical and plastics fields. When a new trademark comes in, we break it down into syllables and see if it's in our decomputer. If it's not here, we search it in the Trademark Division of the Patent Office, in Washington."

"What syllables do you have on your, ah, decomputer?" said Jayne uneasily.

"Really only the extremely common ones. For prefixes, things like 'ray', 'hy', 'no', 'ko', 'kor', 'di', 'so', 'ro', the 'par-per-pro' set, 'vel', 'val', and of course, 'neo'."

"Neo, you said?"

"Yes, 'neo', which is simply the Greek variant of 'new', which again frequently comes out as 'nu', or in the Latin form, 'novo'."

"And I presume 'ol' is among your proscribed suffixes?" demanded Jayne bitterly.

"Yes, that's 'ol', from Latin, 'oleum', oil. So that gives us 'Neol', or 'new oil'."

Jayne frowned and looked at his notes. "Well, how about 'Neolan'? Or do you have 'lan' in your suffixes, too?"

"Yes, indeed. But there again, we consider 'lan' as a species of the 'on' family, from 'rayon', of course. Between vowels, 'on' takes a consonant, so you would come out with 'lin', 'lan', 'lon', and so you have 'neolan'."

Jayne threw up his hands. "Well, then, you fellows just do whatever you have to do, to fix this. Say the right words over it. Do your legal mumbo jumbo."

Patrick studied Jane quietly for a moment. "Harvey. I'm going to do something I shouldn't. I'll clear a trademark — no, not Neol. Some other mark."

Jayne looked dubious. "*We* would have to originate it. Our ad people have to screen these things. All kinds of image and audio requirements."

"Impossible, Harvey. This is not a job for the agency. All they can do is put together syllables to skirt along the fringes of what they think your customers will almost but not quite recognise. The way they draw up those lists, they practically guarantee their mark will be weak. Leave them out of this. I'll give you a mark I will guarantee *you* will like and that will not infringe any existing mark."

"But if it isn't on my list, how can you be so sure I'll like it?"

Patrick smiled. "We've never lost a customer."

"Probably it will be very similar to a trademark on my list."

Patrick picked up the list and scanned it briefly. "No, I think not. But we're wasting time. Let's move on to the next item."

"Next item?"

"Payment."

"Charge my department."

"You don't quite understand, Harvey. Let's go over it again. I'm promising you a clean, desirable trademark. I'm giving you a guarantee — on something that as yet doesn't even exist. I don't have to do it. This is above and beyond the call of duty. A big favour to you."

"So?"

"If the company gets sued, you're in the clear, but it's a black eye for me. They'll say Hope needs a younger man in their Patent Department. Patrick is slipping. And then the next time it happens, I'm out on my ear. So I'm taking a chance, and I want payment."

Jayne was suspicious. "Like what?"

"We need not be crass. You could offer a prize for a suitable mark."

"And *you* would win it?"

"The Patent Department would win it."

"Go on," said Jayne acidly.

"The prize couldn't be money."

"I can see that. As you say, crass. How about wall-to-wall carpeting?"

"No."

"A conference room ... "

"Not that, either."

"Electric typewriters ... "

"Not exactly what I had in mind."

"Then what *do* you want?"

Patrick leaned over and murmured, "Willow."

Jayne was silent for a moment. Finally he said, "I don't know what to say. It's cheap, shoddy, not in character with you, Con. Furthermore, I don't make the rules. This promotion program is a company policy. It's not anything you or I have anything to do with. I

need a secretary. I have a vacancy. I either fill it by promoting a girl from the lab, or I go outside. I think it's a good policy."

"So do I," said Patrick morosely. "I hate to do this."

"You don't have to do it. In fact, you're being absolutely unreasonable. If you insist on doing this to me, I'll have to take it up with Andrew Bleeker."

"If you do that, you could get me in trouble."

"As you say, I would hate to have to do it,"

"At the same time, you will also have to mention to Bleeker that you couldn't get the Manual out in time for the Board. You won't have to tell him why, though. He'll be first on my list of carbons of my trademark infringement report to you. He will not be happy."

The room became very quiet. The pale drift of typewriters ebbed and flowed in the outer bays.

Jayne's restraint was massive. "You win."

"Thank you, Harvey. And now, just so we won't have any misunderstandings, when Miss Willow comes back to us from having been your secretary, she'll keep her double raise?"

"I thought that she was never leaving you. How can she come back to you?"

"It's all over the place, Harvey, that she's being transferred to you. If we kept her here, she'd be entitled to think that we cheated her out of a raise. So we have to get her transferred to you on the books, get her double raise, and then transferred back to us on the books. Physically, of course, there would seem to be no reason for her to transfer ... that is, clean out her desk, or anything like that."

"So that not only I don't get a secretary, Willow gets two raises."

"But you get a clean bill of health for your Manual."

"And a good trademark?"

"Absolutely." Patrick was solemn. "We can pick one here and now. We guarantee we can get the trademark application on file this afternoon. All we need is a more exotic name — one not made out of these garden variety building units, A really *beautiful* name."

Cord picked up the cue. "How about some foreign words that mean 'beautiful'?"

"Well, there's a thought. Harvey, what do you think?"

Jayne shrugged his shoulders. "Like what?"

"*Pulchra* — Latin for 'pretty'," said Cord.

"Hard to do anything with it," said Patrick. "What else?"

"*Kallos* — 'beautiful' in Greek."

Patrick looked doubtful. "*Bel*?" said Cord.

"That's a little better. What is it in Italian?"

"*Bella*."

"Still not quite right," said Patrick.

"You could take a big jump. 'Beautiful' in German is *schön*. You'd have to Anglicise the accent a little, give it a long 'a'."

"Ah yes. 'Shane'. *Shane!*" Patrick's eyes lit up. "I really like that. Harvey?"

"Not bad. Shane. Hm-m-m. Yes, I must admit, there's something about it. Something tantalising."

"I hear it, too, Harvey."

Cord's eyes rolled upward briefly.

"How long will it take to search it out in the Washington trademarks?" demanded Jayne.

"We can do it this afternoon. My man will call in, any minute now, and we'll tell him to go ahead."

"I'll take it," said Jayne.

"Good enough. If it's clear in the Trademark Division, we'll get the application on file this afternoon."

Jayne looked surprised. "You'll have to have labels made up. Then you'll have to make a bona fide sale in interstate commerce. And then have the trademark application executed by Andy Bleeker. I don't think you can do all that in three hours. And I won't pay off on a phony."

"Of course not." Patrick smiled angelically as the other left.

In the early afternoon Patrick walked across the court to the terpineol pilot plant and into the cramped dusty office of John Fast. As he stepped inside, his eyes were drawn immediately across the cubicle, beyond Fast's desk, to a large painting, in black and white, hanging on the wall behind Fast. He poised at the doorway, slackjawed, staring at this ... thing.

Within the plain black frame were two figures, one large, and, in front, a smaller. The outlines of the larger figure seemed initially luminous, hazy, then, even as he squinted, perplexed and uneasy, the lines seemed to crystallise, and suddenly a face took form, with eyes, a mouth, and arms. The arms were reaching out, enfolding the figure in front, a man wearing a medieval velvet robe and feathered beret.

Unaccountably, Patrick shivered. His eyes dropped, and found themselves locked with those of John Fast, unquestioning, waiting.

Fast murmured, "It is an oversize reproduction of Harry Clarke's pen-and-ink drawing, the end-piece of Bayard Taylor's translation of Goethe."

"What is it?" blurted Patrick.

"Mephistopheles, taking Faust," said John Fast.

Patrick took a deep breath and got his voice under control. "Very effective." He paused. "John, I'm here to ask a favour."

Fast was silent.

"I understand you have a certain skill in the art of hypnosis."

Fast's great dark eyes washed like tides at Patrick. "That's not quite the right word. But perhaps the result is similar."

"I'll come to the point. All this is highly confidential. Our basic terpineol patent application is in interference in the Patent Office. We intend to dissolve the interference by a motion contending that the interference count is unpatentable over the prior art. This prior art is a college thesis. The problem is, Paul Bleeker is the only one who has seen the thesis, and he can't remember anything about it. Is it possible for him to remember, under hypnosis?"

"It's possible," said Fast, "but by no means a certainty."

"But isn't it true that everyone records, somewhere on his cerebrum, everything he has ever experienced?"

"Possibly. But that doesn't necessarily mean we can remember it all. Recall is a complicated process. The theory in fashion today is the 'see-all-forget-nearly-all' theory. In this one, every bit of incoming sensation is recorded and filed away in your subconscious. But to bring it up again, you not only have to call for it, you also have to walk it out, holding it by the hand, chopping along with a mental machete to clear away all the subconscious blocks along its path. Persistence will turn up many a forgotten item in this way. But if it's quite old, there may be so many blocks that it will never be able to penetrate the conscious mind. In this case you have to get down there with it, in your far subconscious — take a good look at it, and then holler out to somebody what you see. Hypnosis is the accepted procedure. In the hands of an expert, all kinds of oddities can be turned up in this way: stimuli the subject barely had time to receive; or things, which, if recalled on a conscious level, would be intolerable."

"I want you to try it on Paul Bleeker tonight "

Fast hesitated a moment. "I gather you renamed 'Neol'?"

Patrick's eyebrows arched. "Yes. How did you know?"

"It was best for your patents, and you always do what's best for your patents."

" 'Neol' was a poor trademark," said Patrick doggedly. "That was the only reason we changed."

"What is the new name?" asked Fast.

And now Patrick hesitated. He found himself unwilling to answer this question. Suddenly, he almost disliked John Fast. He shook himself.

"Shane," he said curtly.

Tiny iridescent lights seemed to sparkle from somewhere deep in the eyes of the other.

"Well?" demanded Patrick.

"Exquisite," murmured Fast. "I will do this thing for you. It may involve something more than hypnotism. You understand that, don't you?"

"Of course."

"No, you don't. You can't, at least not yet, But no matter. If Paul is willing, I will do it for you anyway. Since you are totally committed, it cannot be otherwise."

> *Those who have lost an infant are never, as it were, without an infant child. They are the only persons who, in one sense, retain it always.*
>
> — Leigh Hunt

Andrew Bleeker swung his swivel chair slowly back and forth as he motioned to the two chairs nearest his desk.

Patrick said cheerfully, "Good afternoon, Andy."

Harvey Jayne grunted. He was not cheerful.

Bleeker's eyes flickered broodingly at Patrick's face. He had a horror of these nasty internecine arguments. Patrick beamed back, and Bleeker sighed. "I'll come to the point, Con. There seems to be some question about the way you handled Harvey's Neol Manual."

"Really? I realise I wasn't able to satisfy him completely, but I didn't think he felt strongly enough about it to take it to the head office."

"What was the problem, Con?"

Harvey rose out of his chair. "Andy, let *me* state — "

"Con?" said Bleeker quietly.

"I sort of blackmailed him, Andy. I pressured him into giving one of our secretaries a double raise, out of *his* budget. In return I got him a good trademark, made an infringement search on it, and got the trademark application on file in the Patent Office, all within four hours. He still has time to get his brochure proofs corrected and back to the printers tonight. But it isn't the Neol Manual anymore. We changed the trademark to 'Shane'."

" 'Shane'?"

"Harvey picked it out, all by himself."

"You don't say," murmured Bleeker.

"The name is all right," grumbled Jayne. "It's the trademark *application* I'm protesting. It's a fraud, a phony. Andy, you perjured yourself when you made oath that the company had used the trademark in commerce. The mark didn't even exist until a few hours ago, and I know for a fact our shipping department hasn't mailed out

anything labeled 'Shane' across a state line. It has to be interstate commerce, you know. But there hasn't been any shipment at all. Not one of the packages has left the Patent Department. I just checked."

Bleeker hunched his shoulders and began to swing his chair in slow oscillations. "Con?"

"He has the facts very nearly straight, Andy, but his inference is wrong. There was no fraud. When you signed the declaration, you did not commit perjury."

"But doesn't the form say that the goods have been shipped in interstate commerce? Didn't I sign something to that effect?"

"The trademark application simply asks for the date of first use in commerce. The statute defines commerce as that commerce regulated by Congress. *That's* been settled for over a hundred and fifty years. Congress controls commerce between the states and territories, commerce between the United States and foreign countries, and commerce with the Indian tribes."

"But we didn't ship in interstate commerce," said Jayne.

"That's right," said Patrick.

"Nor in foreign commerce?" asked Bleeker.

"No, Andy."

"That leaves — "

"The Indians," said Patrick.

"Apaches," said Jayne acidly, "disguised as patent attorneys."

"Not exactly Apaches, Harvey," said Patrick. "But we do have a lawful representative of the Sioux tribe, duly accredited to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington. Commerce is with the Sioux, through their representative. A sale to her is a sale to the tribe. If you checked on the packages, you probably noticed that one was on her desk."

"*Her* desk," rasped Jayne. "This ... Indian ... *you mean* — "

"Miss Green Willow, late of the Sioux reservation? Of course. Drives a hard bargain. We finally settled on fifteen cents for the gallon jug of terpineol. Her people back in Wyoming will make it into soap for the tourists."

Bleeker seemed suddenly to have problems with his face, and this was detectable largely by the efforts he was making to freeze his mouth in an expression of polite inquiry. Then his cheeks turned crimson, his stomach jumped, and he hastily swivelled his chair away from his visitors.

There was a long silence. Jayne looked from Bleeker's back to Patrick's earnest innocence. He was bewildered.

Finally Bleeker's chair swung around again.. His eyes looked watery, but his voice was under control. "Harvey, can't we be satisfied to leave it this way?"

Jayne stood up. "Whatever you say, Andy." He refused to look at Patrick.

Bleeker smiled. "Well, gentlemen."

Jayne walked stiffly out the door. Patrick started to follow.

"Just a minute, Con," said Bleeker. He motioned Patrick back inside. "Close the door."

"Yes, Andy?"

Bleeker grinned. "One day, Con, they'll get you. They'll nail you to the wall. They'll hang you up by the thumbs. You have got to stop this. Is Willow really an Indian?"

"Certainly, she is." Patrick was plaintive. "Doesn't anybody trust me? The arrangement is legal."

"Of course, of course," soothed Bleeker. "I was just thinking, how convenient to have your own Indian when you need a quick trademark registration. It's like having a notary public in your office."

"All our secretaries are notaries," said Patrick, puzzled.

Bleeker sighed. "Of course. They would be. I stepped into that one, didn't I?"

"What?"

"Never mind." Bleeker's chair began its slow rhythm again. "How's that chess player getting along? Alec Cord?"

"He made second place in the D.C. Annual."

"He's still not in your league, though, Con. Nobody, absolutely nobody, can equal your brand of chess."

Patrick squirmed. "I don't even know the moves, Andy."

"And your contract man, Sullivan? Can he write as good a contract as you?"

"Much better," said Patrick.

"Did he write the contract that bound you to the Hope Patent Department?"

"What do you mean, Andy?"

"Oh, never mind. I don't know what I mean. I don't think I'll ever understand you patent fellows. Take Paul. Chemists become lawyers; lawyers never become chemists. Paul can't — or won't — explain it. There's probably something profound in this, but I've never been able to unravel it. Does it mean chemists have the intellect and energy to rise to advocacy, but that lawyers could never rise further into the realm of science? Or does it mean that the law is the best of all professions, that once in the law, other disciplines are attained?"

Bleeker's chair began to swivel slowly again. Patrick knew what was coming. He got everything under control.

"How *is* Paul the patent lawyer?" asked Bleeker.

"A competent man," said Patrick carefully. "We're glad you sent him around to us."

Bleeker was almost defensive. "You know why I did it, Con. There's nobody else in the company I could trust to make him toe the mark. Really make him. You know what I mean."

"Sure, Andy, I know. He's a bright kid. I would have hired him anyway. Quit worrying about him. Just let him do a good job, day by day. Same as I did when I worked for you."

"I worked you hard, Con. Make Paul work hard."

"He works hard, Andy."

"And there's one more thing, Con. You switched trademarks. Neol to ... Shane, you said?"

"That's right. Neol is a poor trademark. Shane is better."

"That's another thing Jayne is going to hold against you, Con, Switching marks on his cherished Manual."

"It isn't really that bad, Andy." Patrick marveled at the older man's technique. At no time during the conversation had Bleeker asked Patrick whether the Patent Department was going to approve the terpineol plant, nor in fact had he asked him anything at all about the terpineol patent situation, even though they both knew this was vital to Bleeker's future in the company. And yet the questions, and the pressure were there, all the same, and the questions were being asked by their very obvious omission. Patrick decided to meet the matter with directness. He said simply: "We haven't completely resolved the patent problem, Andy. But we certainly hope to have the answer for you well before the Board meeting Monday morning. With luck, we may even have it tonight."

Bleeker murmured absently, "That's fine, Con."

Patrick started to get up, but Bleeker stopped him with a gesture.

"Shane," said Bleeker thoughtfully. "Very curious." His eyes became contemplative. "Perhaps you never realised it, Con, but we regarded your wife as an outstanding scientist. *You* were wise, however, to take up law in night school."

Patrick nodded, wondering.

"We got interested in her," continued Bleeker, "when she was just finishing up her master's degree at State. I think we still have her thesis around somewhere. Old Rohberg made a special trip to drive her up for her interview. She was so pretty, I made her an offer on the spot. My only error was in turning her over to you for the standard lab tour. You louse."

Patrick smiled, his face warmly reminiscent.

Bleeker studied the other man carefully. "What was the name of your little girl?"

"Shan."

"Odd name."

"Lilas picked it. It's short for *'chandelle'*, French for 'candle'. Lilas

was French, you know. Lilas Blanc. White lilac. And Shan was our little candle. The wallpaper in the nursery was designed with a candle print. The lights above her crib were artificial candles. We painted fluorescent candles inside her crib. She would pat them every night before I tucked her in."

Bleeker cleared his throat. "Con, sooner or later somebody's going to tell Harvey Jayne that you renamed Neol after your baby daughter."

Patrick didn't get it. He stared back, stupidly. "After ... Shan?"

"Well, didn't you? Shan ... Shane ... ?"

Patrick felt his insides collapsing. "But I didn't ... " he blurted. "It didn't occur to me." Then his mouth twisted into a lopsided smile. "At least, consciously. But there it is, isn't it? So maybe you're right, Andy. I really walked into that one. There I was, telling Cord that Jayne's mental blocks wouldn't let him see why he liked Shane. The same rule applied to me, although I don't want my daughter's name on terpineol, plastered on tank cars, warehouses, stationery, magazine ads. Too late now. Botched the whole thing."

Bleeker regarded him gravely. "Con, how long has it been now, since the ... accident?"

"Three years."

"You're still a young man, Con. Relatively speaking. Our young ladies think it's about time you got back into circulation."

"You might be right, Andy."

Bleeker coughed. "You're just being agreeable to avoid an argument. Believe me, Con, it's one thing to remember the dead. It's an altogether different thing to have your every waking thought controlled by your memories. You ought to get away from that place."

Patrick was shocked. "Move? From the garden? The house? It has our bedroom. Shan's room. How about Lilas? How about Shan? They're *buried* there. Their ashes — "

"Ashes?"

"They were cremated. Lilas wanted it that way. I spread the ashes in the lilacs."

The older man looked at him with compassion. "Then release *them*. Con. Let *them* go."

"I *can't,* Andy." Patrick's face twisted. "They're all I have. Can't you understand?"

"I guess I do, Con. I guess I do. I'm sorry. None of my business, really."

On this night of all nights in the year,
Ah, what demon has tempted me here?
— Edgar Alan Poe, *Ulalume*

The evening was warm, and along about ten o'clock the party drifted down into the garden.

Patrick, as usual drinking only beer, was, for all practical purposes, cold sober, a condition that enhanced rather than alleviated an unexplainable and growing sense of anxiety. The nearness of the lilacs, usually a thing of nostalgic pleasure, somehow contributed to his edginess. He was startled to note that several clusters were on the verge of opening. He started to call Cord's attention to this, then thought better of it. And then he wondered "Why didn't I? What's the matter with me? What's going on?"

The group was in the arbour now. He would have to get on with it, the reason why they were all here. Paul Bleeker and John Fast knew what they were supposed to do. All he had to do was to ask them to start. Paul was already seated at the stone table. As he watched, Paul pulled the table drawer out in an idle exploratory gesture.

"My notes for a patent law article I started ... a couple of years ago," said Patrick wryly. "I just can't seem to get back to it."

"Then perhaps you should be thankful," said Fast,

"What do you mean?"

"A professional man writes for a variety of reasons," said Fast. "I'm working now on my 'Encyclopedia of Oxidative Reactions'. I know why I'm writing it. And I know why you're not writing Con. It's because life has been kind to you. Let it stay that way."

Paul Bleeker broke in. "You say a professional man writes for a variety of reasons, John. Name one. Why do you write?"

Fast's dark eyes turned on Paul Bleeker. "You have heard it said, a man owes a debt to his profession. This may be true. But no professional man pays his debt by writing for the profession. If he is an independent, say a consulting engineer, or a partner in a law firm, or a history professor in a big university, he publishes because it's part of his job to advertise himself and his establishment. There's very little money in it *per se*. If he's a rising young man in a corporate research or corporate law department, he writes for the reputation. It helps him move up. If his own company doesn't recognise him, their competitors will. But if he's already at the top of his department in his company, he has none of these incentives. But he doesn't need them. If such a man writes, he has behind him the strongest force known to the human mind."

"And what might that be?"

"Guilt," said Fast quietly. "He writes to hide from the things he has done in the name of his profession. It gives him a protective cocoon to burrow into. A smoke screen to hide behind."

"In the name of the patent system," said Patrick firmly, "I've committed every crime known to man. And still I can't get started."

"You've done very little, really," said Fast in his nearly inaudible monotone. "But when you really have done something, you'll know it. You won't have to wonder or conjecture. Then, you'll begin to write. It'll come instantly. No floundering. No lost motion. You'll leap to it. The words, pages, and chapters will pour out in a torrent. It will be your salvation, your sure escape."

They stared at him. Cord laughed nervously. "So why do *you* write, John? What is your unspeakable crime?"

Fast turned his great black eyes on the other, almost unseeing. "I cannot tell you, my friend. And you wouldn't believe me if I did tell you. Anyhow, it can never happen to you." He looked away to Patrick. "But to you, Con, it could happen. And it could happen soon. Tonight. In this place."

Patrick laughed shakily. "Well, now, John. You know how careful I am. Nothing is going to happen to me. It's spare time I need to start writing, not penitence."

Fast looked at him gravely. "You do not weep. You smile. Before the Nazarene called Lazarus up, He wept." His toneless eyes seemed almost sad. "How can I explain this to you. Then let it be done. I have placed the Shane Manual at the five angles of the pentagram. I think they are waiting."

"They?" stammered Patrick. "Oh yes, of course. The fellows. Perhaps we should begin."

"What's that smell?" called Sullivan.

"It's a terpineol," said Fast, sniffing a moment. "Like 'Shane'. Maybe a mixture of alpha and gamma terpineols." He snapped his fingers. "Of course!"

"Of course ... *what*?" said Patrick. His voice was under control, but he felt his armpits sweating copiously.

"The mixture ... very correctly balanced, I'd say. Just right for synthetic oil of lilac"

Patrick was struck dumb.

"That's very odd," said Sullivan. "Con's lilacs are not open yet."

"The odour must be coming from somewhere."

"Maybe we're all tired," said Cord. "Breeds hallucinations, you know."

Patrick looked at him in wonder.

"It's hard to convince anybody that odour can have a supra-chemical source," said Fast.

Cord laughed incredulously. "You mean there's something out there that is synthesising oil of lilac ... or Shane ... or whatever it is?"

"We are so accustomed to thinking of the impact of odours *on* people that we don't think too much about the creation of odours *by* people. Actually, of course, everyone has his characteristic scent, and it's generally not unpleasant, at least under conditions of reasonable cleanliness. In this, man is not really basically different from the other animals. But man — or rather, a certain few extraordinary people — seem to have the ability, quite possibly involuntary, of evoking odours that could not possibly have come from the human sweat gland."

"*Evoking*?" said Sullivan.

"No other word seems to describe the phenomenon. Chemically speaking, in the sense of detectable air-borne molecules dissolving in the olfactory mucosa, the presence of odour is indeed arguable. On the other hand, in the strictly neuro-psychic sense, that an 'odour' response has been received in the cerebrum, there can be no real doubt. The phenomenon has been reported and corroborated by entire groups. The 'odour of sanctity' of certain saints and mystics seems to fall in this category. Thomas Aquinas radiated the scent of male frankincense. Saint John of the Cross had a strong odour of lilies. When the tomb of Saint Theresa of Avila — the 'great' Theresa — was opened in 1583, the scent of violets gushed out. And more recently, the odour of roses has been associated with Saint Theresa of Lisieux — the 'little' Theresa." He looked at Patrick. "I think — everyone is ready."

Patrick wiped his face with his handkerchief. "Go ahead," he said hoarsely.

Ma chandelle est morte ...
— French Nursery Rhyme

Paul Bleeker was seated in the iron chair at the stone table. John Fast faced him, from one side. The others stood behind Paul.

"You are in a long dark tunnel," said John Fast quietly. "Just now everything is pitch black. But your eyes are beginning to adjust."

There was absolute silence. Then Fast's voice droned on. "In a little while, far ahead of you, you will be able to see the tunnel opening. It will be a tiny disk of light. When you see this little light, I want you to nod your head gently."

From far down stream drifted the plaintive call of a whip-poor-will.

Paul Bleeker's eyes were heavy, glazed. His stony slump in the iron chair was broken only by his slow rhythmic breathing.

"You now see the little light — the mouth of the tunnel," monotoned Fast. "Nod your head."

"Candle," whispered Paul.

Patrick started, then recovered himself instantly.

Fast picked it up smoothly. "Watch the candle," he said. "Soon it will start to move toward you. It is beginning to move."

"Closer," murmured Paul.

In a flash of feverish ingenuity Patrick stepped forward, seized the wine bottle and its stub of candle from the stone table, struck his lighter, then lit the candle. He replaced the bottle on the table front. The flame wavered a moment, then flickered up. Patrick stole a glance at Paul's face. It was frozen, impassive.

Fast continued gravely: "Soon you will have enough light to see that you are sitting at your desk in the library. In a moment you will see the piles of books on the tables near by. There are several books on your desk. There's a big book just in front of you. Now the candle is close enough."

"Close," murmured Paul.

The hair on Patrick's scalp was rising. The odour of lilacs was stifling. And he then noticed that the lilacs were opening, all around him. He somehow realised that lilacs do not bloom in minutes. It was a botanical impossibility. He could almost hear the tender calyxes folding back.

Fast continued. "You are opening the front cover. You are looking at the title page. It is typewritten. It is a thesis. You are able to read everything. You can see the name clearly. The name of the student is — "

Patrick heard gasps behind him, and his eyes suddenly came into focus. Beyond Paul, on the far edge of the stone table, beyond the candle, he saw the two figures. They were wavering, silent, indistinct, but they were there. The larger one would just about reach his chin. The eyes of the small one came barely to the table edge.

He wanted to scream, but nothing would come out of his throat.

The taller figure was leaning over the table towards Paul, and she was holding something ... an open book. But neither figure was looking at Paul. Both of them were looking at him. He knew them.

In this frozen moment his nose twitched. The scent of lilacs wavered, then was suddenly smothered by something sharp, acrid. Patrick recognised it, without thinking. It was ozone. And as if in confirmation of its olfactory trademark, a luminous ... thing ... was taking shape behind the two figures. Suddenly it acquired a face, then eyes. Then arms reaching out, encircling.

Patrick had a horrid, instantaneous flash of recognition. The portrait in John Fast's office. Mephistopheles taking Faust.

"The name of the student is Lilas Blanc," said Paul Bleeker metallically. "State U — "

"Oh, God, *NO*!" screamed Patrick.

The candle blew out instantly. Paul struggled in his chair.

"Hey, what ... where?" He knocked the chair over getting up.

The voices rose up around Patrick in the darkness.

He dropped in a groaning heap on the grass. "Lilas, Shan, forgive me. I didn't know." But he must have known. All along.

And now his mind began to swing like a pendulum, faster and faster, finally oscillating in a weird rhythm of patterns so bewildering and contradictory that he could hardly follow them. His mind said to him, they escaped. It said to him, they did not escape. It said to him, they were there. It said, nothing was there. And then it started again. His throat constricted, his teeth bit the turf, and by brazen command his thoughts slowed their wounded flailing. He ceased to ask, to wonder. And finally he refused to think at all.

He heard Cord's firm voice. Somebody found the light switch. There were querulous whispers. And then there was something on his back. Some of them had dropped their jackets on him. A man's hand lingered briefly on his shoulder. It was a gentle, even affectionate gesture, and he recognised the touch as that of a man accustomed to tucking small children into their beds at night. He had used the same touch, many times, and long ago.

And now the sound of footsteps facing. And then, motors starting. And finally, nothing, just the splash of the little falls, the crickets, and far away, the whip-poor-will.

He did not want to move. He wanted only never to have been born.

He closed his eyes, and sleep locked him in.

> *I hold every man a debtor to his profession; from the which, as men, of course do seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they of duty to endeavor themselves by way of amends to be a help and ornament thereunto.*
>
> — Francis Bacon, Preface to Maxims of the Law

It was early morning, and with the pink of dawn on his cheek, waking was instantaneous. His mind was clear and serene as he threw the jackets aside and got to his feet. He rubbed his eyes, stretched with enormous gusto, and walked over to the lily pond. A green frog was sitting on a pad of the yellow lotus, but jumped in as Patrick bent over to splash water on his face. He dried his face on his shirt-tail, which was flopping out over his belt.

The sun was now barely over the little hill, and a shaft of light was slicing into the pond. Patrick considered this phenomenon briefly,

then peered into the bottom of the pool for the refracted beam. There was some kind of rule of optics — law of sines. Somebody's law. Check into it. Meanwhile, there was work to be done. Important work.

He walked into the arbour, picked up the overturned iron chair, sat down at the stone table, and pulled a pencil and paper pad out of the drawer. After a moment, he began to write; slowly, at first.

"Ex parte Gulliksen revisited. The typewritten college thesis as a prior printed publication. This decision from the Patent Office Board of Appeals in ... "

Then faster and faster. " ... essential, of course, that the thesis be available to the public. This requirement is satisfied by ... "

Now, he was writing furiously, and the pages were accumulating.

He was going to make it. Just a question of staying with it, now, and it would give him complete protection. No need to worry about what to work on *after* this article, either. He knew he could turn out a text. No trouble at all. Or even an encyclopedia. Patrick, 'Chemical Patent Practice', four volumes. He could see it now. Red vinyl covers, gilt lettering.

The stack of sheets torn from his pad was now quite bulky. He pushed the pile to the table corner, and in. so doing knocked the bottle and candle unheeding to the ground and into the withering lilacs. Already he could visualise his 'Preface to the First Edition'. It should be something special, based perhaps on a precisely apt quotation. What was that thing from Bacon? He frowned, puzzled. No. There was something not quite right about *that.* But never mind. Plenty of others. Somehow, somewhere, there would be a word for him.

... In English the word 'supernatural' must do service as both adjective and noun; there is 'nature' but no 'supernature' Perhaps this is a real, and not merely a linguistic truth, ... By the supernatural we mean those instincts and perceptions about the universe that make no sense in rational terms but that, ewer many centuries and in many countries, have never been lost or eradicated. ...

Jung saw the unconscious as composed of several 'levels': the barely subliminal level of unconscious memories ... temporarily forgotten or ignored, which could as easily become conscious; the level of the personal complexes and repressed wishes, fears and so on; and finally ... on the collective level, common to the entire race throughout history, exist the deep instinctual tendencies, that produced in primeval man (probably through dreams, among other means) his concrete belief in the supernatural. And these same unconscious collective tendencies, which Jung called the archetypes, exist in us today, (Douglas Hill and Pat Williams, The Supernatural, *Hawthorne, 1966)*

Narrow Valley
R. A. Lafferty

In the year 1893, land allotments in severalty were made to the remaining eight hundred and twenty-one Pawnee Indians. Each would receive one hundred and sixty acres of land and no more, and thereafter the Pawnees would be expected to pay taxes on their land, the same as the White-Eyes did.

"Kitkehahke!" Clarence Big-Saddle cussed. "You can't kick a dog around proper on a hundred and sixty acres. And I sure am not hear before about this pay taxes on land."

Clarence Big-Saddle selected a nice green valley for his allotment. It was one of the half dozen plots he had always regarded as his own. He sodded around the summer lodge that he had there and made it an all-season home. But he sure didn't intend to pay taxes on it.

So he burned leaves and bark and made a speech:

"That my valley be always wide and flourish and green and such stuff as that!" he orated in Pawnee chant style, "but that it be narrow if an intruder come."

He didn't have any balsam bark to burn. He threw on a little cedar bark instead. He didn't have any elder leaves. He used a handful of jack-oak leaves. And he forgot the word. How you going to work it if you forget the word?

"Petahauerat!" he howled out with the confidence he hoped would fool the fates.

"That's about the same long of a word," he said in a low aside to himself. But he was doubtful. "What am I, a White Man, a burr-tailed jack, a new kind of nut to think it will work?" he asked. "I have to laugh at me. Oh well, we see."

He threw the rest of the bark and the leaves on the fire, and he hollered the wrong word out again.

And he was answered by a dazzling sheet of summer lightning.

"Skidi!" Clarence Big-Saddle swore. "It worked. I didn't think it would."

Clarence Big-Saddle lived on his land for many years, and he paid no taxes. Intruders were unable to come down to his place. The land was sold for taxes three times, but nobody ever came down to claim it. Finally, it was carried as open land on the books. Homesteaders filed on it several times, but none of them fulfilled the qualification of living on the land.

Half a century went by. Clarence Big-Saddle called his son.

"I've had it, boy," he said. "I think I'll just go in the house and die."

"O.K. dad," the son Clarence Little-Saddle said. "I'm going in to town to shoot a few games of pool with the boys. I'll bury you when I get back this evening."

So the son Clarence Little-Saddle inherited. He also lived on the land for many years without paying taxes.

There was a disturbance in the courthouse one day. The place seemed to be invaded in force, but actually there were but one man, one woman, and five children. "I'm Robert Rampart," said the man, "and we want the Land Office."

"I'm Robert Rampart Junior," said a nine year old gangler, "and we want it pretty blamed quick."

"I don't think we have anything like that," the girl at the desk said. "Isn't that something they had a long time ago?"

"Ignorance is no excuse for inefficiency, my dear," said Mary Mabel Rampart, an eight year old who could easily pass for eight and a half. "After I make my report, I wonder who will be sitting at your desk tomorrow?"

"You people are either in the wrong state or the wrong century," the girl said.

"The Homestead Act still obtains," Robert Rampart insisted.

"There is one tract of land carried as open in this county. I want to file on it."

Cecilia Rampart answered the knowing wink of a beefy man at a distant desk. "Hi," she breathed as she slinked over. "I'm Cecilia Rampart, but my stage name is Cecilia San Juan. Do you think that seven is too young to play ingenue roles?"

"Not for you," the man said. "Tell your folks to come over here."

"Do you know where the Land Office is?" Cecilia asked.

"Sure. It's the fourth left-hand drawer of my desk. The smallest office we got in the whole courthouse. We don't use it much any more."

The Ramparts gathered around. The beefy man started to make out the papers.

"This is the land description — " Robert Rampart began, " — why, you've got it down already. How did you know?"

"I've been around here a long time," the man answered.

They did the paper work, and Robert Rampart filed on the land.

"You won't be able to come onto the land itself, though," the man said.

"Why won't I?" Rampart demanded. "Isn't the land description accurate?"

"Oh, I suppose so. But nobody's ever been able to get to the land.

It's become a sort of joke."

"Well, I intend to get to the bottom of that joke," Rampart insisted. "I will occupy the land, or I will find out why not."

"I'm not sure about that," the beefy man said. "The last man to file on the land, about a dozen years ago, wasn't able to occupy the land. And he wasn't able to say why he couldn't. It's kind of interesting, the look on their faces after they try it for a day or two, and then give it up."

The Ramparts left the courthouse, loaded into their camper, and drove out to find their land. They stopped at the house of a cattle and wheat farmer named Charley Dublin. Dublin met them with a grin which indicated he had been tipped off.

"Come along if you want to, folks," Dublin said. "The easiest way is on foot across my short pasture here. Your land's directly west of mine."

They walked the short distance to the border.

"My name is Tom Rampart, Mr. Dublin." Six year old Tom made conversation as they walked. "But my name is really Ramires, and not Tom. I am the issue of an indiscretion of my mother in Mexico several years ago."

"The boy is a kidder, Mr. Dublin," said the mother Nina Rampart, defending herself. "I have never been in Mexico, but sometimes I have the urge to disappear there forever."

"Ah yes, Mrs. Rampart. And what is the name of the youngest boy here?" Charles Dublin asked.

"Fatty," said Fatty Rampart.

"But surely that is not your given name?"

"Audifax," said five year old Fatty.

"Ah well, Audifax, Fatty, are you a kidder too?"

"He's getting better at it, Mr. Dublin," Mary Mabel said. "He was a twin till last week. His twin was named Skinny. Mama left Skinny unguarded while she was out tippling, and there were wild dogs in the neighbourhood. When mama got back, do you know what was left of Skinny? Two neck bones and an ankle bone. That was all."

"Poor Skinny," Dublin said. "Well, Rampart, this is the fence and the end of my land. Yours is just beyond."

"Is that ditch on my land?" Rampart asked.

"That ditch *is* your land."

"I'll have it filled in. It's a dangerous deep cut even if it is narrow. And the other fence looks like a good one, and I sure have a pretty plot of land beyond it."

"No. Rampart, the land beyond the second fence belongs to Hollistor Hyde," Charley Dublin said. "That second fence is the *end* of your land."

"Now, just wait a minute, Dublin! There's something wrong here. My land is one hundred and sixty acres, which would be a half mile on a side. Where's my half mile width?"

"Between the two fences."

"That's not eight feet."

"Doesn't look like it, does it, Rampart? Tell you what — there's plenty of throwing-sized rocks around. Try to throw one across it."

"I'm not interested in any such boys' games," Rampart exploded. "I want my land."

But the Rampart children *were* interested in such games. They got with it with those throwing rocks. They winged them out over the little gully. The stones acted funny. They hung in the air, as it were, and diminished in size. And they were small as pebbles when they dropped down, down into the gully. None of them could throw a stone across that ditch, and they were throwing kids.

"You and your neighbour have conspired to fence open land for your own use," Rampart charged.

"No such thing, Rampart," Dublin said cheerfully. "My land checks perfectly. So does Hyde's. So does yours, if we knew how to check it. It's like one of those trick topological drawings. It really is a half mile from here to there, but the eye gets lost somewhere. It's your land. Crawl through the fence and figure it out."

Rampart crawled through the fence, and drew himself up to jump the gully. Then he hesitated. He got a glimpse of just how deep that gully was. Still, it wasn't five feet across.

There was a heavy fence post on the ground, designed for use as a corner post. Rampart upended it with some effort. Then he shoved it to fall and bridge the gully. But it fell short, and it shouldn't have. An eight foot post should bridge a five foot gully.

The post fell into the gully, and rolled and rolled and rolled. It spun as though it were rolling outward, but it made no progress except vertically. The post came to rest on a ledge of the gully, so close that Rampart could almost reach out and touch it, but it now appeared no bigger than a match stick.

"There is something wrong with that fence post, or with the world, or with my eyes," Robert Rampart said. "I wish I felt dizzy so I could blame it on that."

"There's a little game that I sometimes play with my neighbour Hyde when we're both out," Dublin said. "I've a heavy rifle and I train it on the middle of his forehead as he stands on the other side of the ditch apparently eight feet away. I fire it off then (I'm a good shot), and I hear it whine across. It'd kill him dead if things were as they seem. But Hyde's in no danger. The shot always bangs into that little scuff of rocks and boulders about thirty feet below him. I can see it

kick up the rock dust there, and the sound of it rattling into those little boulders comes back to me in about two and a half seconds."

A bull-bat (poor people call it the night-hawk) ravelled around in the air and zoomed out over the narrow ditch, but it did not reach the other side. The bird dropped below ground level and could be seen against the background of the other side of the ditch. It grew smaller and hazier as though at a distance of three or four hundred yards. The white bars on its wings could no longer be discerned; then the bird itself could hardly be discerned; but it was far short of the other side of the five foot ditch.

A man identified by Charley Dublin as the neighbour Hollistor Hyde had appeared on the other side of the little ditch. Hyde grinned and waved. He shouted something, but could not be heard.

"Hyde and I both read mouth," Dublin said, "so we can talk across the ditch easy enough. Which kid wants to play chicken? Hyde will barrel a good-sized rock right at your head, and if you duck or flinch you're chicken."

"Me! Me!" Audifax Rampart challenged. And Hyde, a big man with big hands, did barrel a fearsome jagged rock right at the head of the boy. It would have killed him if things had been as they appeared. But the rock diminished to nothing and disappeared into the ditch. Here was a phenomenon — things seemed real-sized on either side of the ditch, but they diminished coming out over the ditch either way.

"Everybody game for it?" Robert Rampart Junior asked.

"We won't get down there by standing here," Mary Mabel said.

"Nothing wenchered, nothing gained," said Cecilia. "I got that from an add for a sex comedy."

Then the five Rampart kids ran down into the gully. Ran *down* is right. It was almost as if they ran down the vertical face of the cliff. They couldn't do that. The gully was no wider than the stride of the biggest kids. But the gully diminished those children, it ate them alive. They were doll-sized. They were acorn-sized. They were running for minute after minute across a ditch that was only five feet across. They were going deeper in it, and getting smaller. Robert Rampart was roaring his alarm, and his wife Nina was screaming. Then she stopped. "What am I carrying oh so loud about?" she asked herself. "It looks like fun. I'll do it too."

She plunged into the gully, diminished in size as the children had done, and ran at a pace to carry her, a hundred yards away across a gully only five feet wide.

That Robert Rampart stirred things up far a while then. He got the sheriff there, and the highway patrolmen. A ditch had stolen his wife and five children, he said, and maybe had killed them. And if anybody laughs, there may be another killing. He got the colonel of

the State National Guard there, and a command post set up. He got a couple of airplane pilots. Robert Rampart had one quality: when he hollered, people came.

He got the newsmen out from T-Town, and the eminent scientists, Dr. Velikof Vonk, Arpad Arkabaranan, and Willy McGilly. That bunch turns up every time you get on a good one. They just happen to be in that part of the country where something interesting is going on.

They attacked the thing from all four sides and the top, and by inner and outer theory. If a thing measures a half mile on each side and the sides are straight, there just has to be something in the middle of it. They took pictures from the air, and they turned out perfect. They proved that Robert Rampart had the prettiest hundred and sixty acres in the country, the larger part of it being a lush green valley, and all of it being a half mile on a side, and situated just where it should be. They took ground-level photos then, and it showed a beautiful half mile stretch of land between the boundaries of Charley Dublin and Hollistor Hyde. But a man isn't a camera? None of them could see that beautiful spread with the eyes in their heads. Where was it?

Down in the valley itself everything was normal. It really was a half mile wide and no more than eighty feet deep with a very gentle slope. It was warm and sweet, and beautiful with grass and grain.

Nina and the kids loved it, and they rushed to see what squatter had built that little house on their land. A house, or a shack. It had never known paint, but paint would have spoiled it. It was built of split timbers dressed near smooth with axe and draw knife, chinked with white clay, and sodded up to about half its height. And there was an interloper standing by the little lodge.

"Here, here what are you doing on our land?" Robert Rampart Junior demanded of the man. "Now you just shamble off again wherever you came from. I'll bet you're a thief too, and those cattle are stolen."

"Only the black-and-white calf," Clarence Little-Saddle said. "I couldn't resist him, but the rest are mine. I guess I'll just stay around and see that you folks get settled all right."

"Is there any wild Indians around here?" Fatty Rampart asked.

"No, not really. I go on a bender about every three months and get a little bit wild, and there's a couple Osage boys from Gray Horse that get noisy sometimes, but that's about all," Clarence Little-Saddle said.

"You certainly don't intend to palm yourself off on us as an Indian," Mary Mabel challenged. "You'll find us a little too knowledgeable for that."

"Little girl, you as well tell this cow there's no room for her to be

a cow since you're so knowledgeable. She thinks she's a shorthorn cow named Sweet Virginia. I think I'm a Pawnee Indian named Clarence. Break it to us real gentle if we're not."

"If you're an Indian where's your war bonnet? There's not a feather on you anywhere."

"How you be sure? There's a story that we got feathers instead of hair on — Aw, I can't tell a joke like that to a little girl! How come you're not wearing the Iron Crown of Lombardy if you're a white girl? How you expect me to believe you're a little white girl? and your folks come from Europe a couple hundred years ago if you don't wear it? There were six hundred tribes, and only one of them, the Oglala Sioux, had the war bonnet, and only the big leaders, never more than two or three of them alive at one time, wore it."

"Your analogy is a little strained," Mary Mabel said. "Those Indians we saw in Florida and the ones at Atlantic City had war bonnets, and they couldn't very well have been the kind of Sioux you said. And just last night on the TV in the motel, those Massachusetts Indians put a war bonnet on the President and called him the Great White Father. You mean to tell me that they were all phonies? Hey, who's laughing at who here?"

"If you're an Indian where's your bow and arrow?" Tom Rampart interrupted. "I bet you can't even shoot one."

"You're sure right there," Clarence admitted. "I never shot one of those things but once in my life. They used to have an archery range in Boulder Park over in T-Town, and you could rent the things and shoot at targets tied to hay bales. Hey, I barked my whole forearm and nearly broke my thumb when the bowstring thwacked home. I couldn't shoot that thing at all. I don't see how anybody ever could shoot one of them."

"O.K. kids," Nina Rampart called to her brood. "Let's start pitching this junk out of the shack so we can move in. Is there any way we can drive our camper down here, Clarence?"

"Sure, there's a pretty good dirt road, and it's a lot wider than it looks from the top. I got a bunch of green bills in an old night charley in the shack. Let me get them, and then I'll clear out for a while. The shack hasn't been cleaned out for seven years, since the last time this happened. I'll show you the road to the top, and you can bring your car down it."

"Hey you old Indian, you lied!" Cecilia Rampart shrilled from the doorway of the shack. "You *do* have a war bonnet. Can I have it?"

"I didn't mean to lie, I forgot about that thing," Clarence Little-Saddle said. "My son Clarence Bare-back sent that to me from Japan for a joke a long time ago. Sure, you can have it."

All the children were assigned tasks carrying the junk out of the

shack and setting fire to it. Nina Rampart and Clarence Little-Saddle ambled up to the rim of the valley by the vehicle road that was wider than it looked from the top.

"Nina, you're back! I thought you were gone forever," Robert Rampart jittered at seeing her again. "What — where are the children?"

"Why, I left them down in the valley, Robert. That is, ah, down in that little ditch right there. Now you've got me worried again. I'm going to drive the camper down there and unload it. You'd better go on down and lend a hand too, Robert, and quit talking to all these funny-looking men here."

And Nina went back to Dublin's place for the camper.

"It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for that intrepid woman to drive a car down into that narrow ditch," the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk said.

"You know how that camel does it?" Clarence Little-Saddle offered, appearing of a sudden from nowhere. "He just closes one of his own eyes and flops back his ears and plunges right through. A camel is mighty narrow when he closes one eye and flops back his ears. Besides, they use a big-eyed needle in the act."

"Where'd this crazy man come from?" Robert Rampart demanded, jumping three feet in the air. "Things are coming out of the ground now. I want my land! I want my children! I want my wife! Whoops, here she comes driving it. Nina you can't drive a loaded camper into a little ditch like that! You'll be killed or collapsed!"

Nina Rampart drove the loaded camper into the little ditch at a pretty good rate of speed. The best of belief is that she just closed one eye and plunged right through. The car diminished and dropped, and it was smaller than a toy car. But it raised a pretty good cloud of dust as it bumped for several hundred yards across a ditch that was only five feet wide.

"Rampart, it's akin to the phenomenon known as looming, only in reverse," the eminent scientist Arpad Arkabaranan explained as he attempted to throw a rock across the narrow ditch. The rock rose very high in the air, seemed to hang at its apex while it diminished to the size of a grain of sand, and then fell into the ditch not six inches of the way across. There isn't anybody going to throw across a half mile valley even if it looks five feet. "Look at a rising moon sometime, Rampart. It appears very large, as though covering a great sector of the horizon, but it only covers one half of a degree. It is hard to believe that you could set seven hundred and twenty of such large moons side by side around the horizon, or that it would take one hundred and eighty of the big things to reach from the horizon to a point overhead. It is also hard to believe that your valley is five

hundred times as wide as it appears, but it has been surveyed, and it is."

"I want my land, I want my children. I want my wife," Robert chanted dully. "Damn, I let her get away again.."

"I tell you, Rampy," Clarence Little-Saddle squared on him, "a man that lets his wife get away twice doesn't deserve to keep her. I give you till night fall; then you forfeit. I've taken a liking to the brood. One of us is going to be down there tonight."

After a while a bunch of them were off in that little tavern on the road between Cleveland and Osage. It was only a half mile away. If the valley had run in the other direction, it would have been only six feet away.

"It is a psychic nexus in the form of an elongated dome," said the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk, "It is maintained subconsciously by the concatenation of at least two minds, the stronger of them belonging to a man dead for many years. It has apparently existed for a little less than a hundred years, and in another hundred years it will be considerably weakened. We know from our checking out of folk tales of Europe as well as Cambodia that these ensorceled areas seldom survive for more than two hundred and fifty years. The person who first saw such a thing in being will usually lose interest in it, and in all worldly things, within a hundred years of his own death. This is a simple thanato-psychic limitation. As a short-term device, the thing has been used several times as a military tactic.

"This psychic nexus, as long as it maintains itself, causes group illusion, but it is really a simple thing. It doesn't fool birds or rabbits or cattle or cameras, only humans. There is nothing meteorological about it. It is strictly psychological. I'm glad I was able to give a scientific explanation to it or it would have worried me."

"It is continental fault coinciding with a noospheric fault," said the eminent scientist Arpad Arkabaranan. "The valley really is a half mile wide, and at the same time it really is only five feet wide. If we measured correctly, we would get these dual measurements. Of course it is meteorological! Everything including dreams is meteorological. It is the animals and cameras which are fooled, as lacking a true dimension; it is only humans who see the true duality. The phenomenon should be common along the whole continental fault where the earth gains or loses a half mile that has to go somewhere. Likely it extends through the whole sweep of the Cross Timbers. Many of those trees appear twice, and many do not appear at all. A man in the proper state of mind could farm that land or raise cattle on it, but it doesn't really exist. There is a clear parallel in the Luftspiegelungthal sector of the Black Forest of Germany which exists, or does not exist, according to the circumstances and to the attitude of

the beholder. Then we have the case of Mad Mountain in Morgan County, Tennessee, which isn't there all the time, and also the Little Lobo Mirage south of Presidio, Texas, from which twenty thousand barrels of water were pumped in one two-and-a-half period before the mirage reverted to mirage status. I'm glad I was able to give a scientific explanation to this or it would have worried me."

"I just don't understand how he worked it," said the eminent scientist Willy McGilly. "Cedar bark, jack-oak leaves, and the word 'Petahauerat'. The thing's impossible! When I was a boy and we wanted to make a hide-out, we used bark from the skunk-spruce tree, the leaves of a box-elder, and the word was 'Boadicea'. All three elements are wrong here. I cannot find a scientific explanation for it, and it does worry me."

They went back to Narrow Valley. Robert Rampart was still chanting dully: "I want my land. I want my children. I want my wife."

Nina Rampart came chugging up out of the narrow ditch in the camper and emerged through that little gate a few yards down the fence row.

"Supper's ready and we're tired of waiting for you, Robert," she said. "A fine homesteader you are! Afraid to come onto your own land! Come along now, I'm tired of waiting for you."

"I want my land! I want my children! I want my wife!" Robert Rampart still chanted. "Oh, there you are, Nina. You stay here this time. I want my land! I want my children! I want an answer to this terrible thing."

"It is time we decided who wears the pants in this family," Nina said stoutly. She picked up her husband, slung him over her shoulder, carried him to the camper and dumped him in, slammed (as it seemed) a dozen doors at once, and drove furiously down into Narrow Valley, which already seemed wider.

Why, that place was getting normaler and normaler by the minute! Pretty soon it looked almost as wide as it was supposed to be. The psychic nexus in the form of an elongated dome had collapsed. The continental fault that coincided with the noospheric fault had faced facts and decided to conform. The Ramparts were in effective possession of their homestead, and Narrow Valley was as normal as any place anywhere.

"I have lost my land," Clarence Little-Saddle moaned. "It was the land of my father Clarence Big-Saddle, and I meant it to be the land of my son Clarence Bare-back. It looked so narrow that people did not notice how wide it was, and people did not try to enter it. Now I have lost it."

Clarence Little-Saddle and the eminent scientist Willy McGilly were standing on the edge of Narrow Valley, which now appeared its

true half-mile extent. The moon was just rising, so big that it filled a third of the sky. Who would have imagined that it would take a hundred and eighty of such monstrous things to reach from the horizon to a point overhead, and yet you could sight it with sighters and figure it so.

"I had the little bear-cat by the tail and I let go," Clarence groaned. "I had a fine valley for free, and I have lost it. I am like that hard-luck guy in the funny-paper or Job in the Bible. Destitution is my lot."

Willy McGilly looked around furtively. They were alone on the edge of the half mile wide valley.

"Let's give it a booster shot," Willy McGilly said.

Hey, those two got with it! They started a snapping fire and began to throw the stuff onto it. Bark from the dog-elm tree — how do you know it won't work?

It *was* working! Already the other side of the valley seemed a hundred yards closer, and there were alarmed noises coming up from the people in the valley.

Leaves from a black locust tree — and the valley narrowed still more! There was, moreover, terrified screaming of both children and big people from the depths of Narrow Valley, and the happy voice of Mary Mabel Rampart chanting "Earthquake! Earthquake!"

"That my valley be always wide and flourish and such stuff, and green with money and grass!" Clarence Little-Saddle orated in Pawnee chant style, "but that it be narrow if intruders come, smash them like bugs!"

People, that valley wasn't over a hundred feet wide now, and the screaming of the people in the bottom of the valley had been joined by the hysterical coughing of the camper car starting up.

Willy and Clarence threw everything that was left on the fire. But the word? The word? Who remembers the word?

"Corsicanatexas!" Clarence Little-Saddle howled out with confidence he hoped would fool the fates.

He was answered, not only by a dazzling sheet of summer lightning, but also by thunder and rain drops.

"Chahiksi!" Clarence Little-Saddle swore. "It worked. I didn't think it would. It will be all right now. I can use the rain."

The valley was again a ditch only five feet wide.

The camper car struggled out of Narrow Valley through the little gate. It was smashed flat as a sheet of paper, and the screaming kids and people in it had only one dimension.

"It's closing in! It's closing in!" Robert Rampart roared, and he was no thicker than if he had been made out of cardboard.

"We're smashed like bugs," the Rampart boys intoned. "We're thin

like paper."

"Mort, ruine, écrasement!" spoke-acted Cecilia Rampart like the great tragedienne she was.

"Help! Help!" Nina Rampart croaked, but she winked at Willy and Clarence as they rolled by. "This homesteading jag always did leave me a little flat."

"Don't throw those paper dolls away. They might be the Ramparts," Mary Mabel called.

The camper car coughed again and bumped along on level ground. This couldn't last forever. The car was widening out as it bumped along.

"Did we overdo it, Clarence?" Willy McGilly asked. "What did one flat-lander say to the other?"

"Dimension of us never got around," Clarence said. "No, I don't think we overdid it, Willy. That car must be eighteen inches wide already, and they all ought to be normal by the time they reach the main road. The next time I do it, I think I'll throw wood-grain plastic on the fire to see who's kidding who."

And then there is gap *(closely related to that other big 'in' word,* alienation); *this one comes with a wide assortment of hyphenates, like* missile-, generation-, *and* credibility-.

Credibility-gap *describes a state of disquietude associated with* the unwilling suspension of belief: *not just the doublethink involved in assessing the Warren Report, Vietnam news, and campaign speeches, but also such phenomena as FDA Chief Goddard's public statement that marijuana is not the addictive menace described by the Narcotics Bureau — or the proclamation, by devout Christian ministers, of the Death of God — or the grudging incredulity with which we attempt to replace the inexact 'evidence' of our senses with the mathematical 'truths' of modern physics, biochemistry, and psychology.*

Or you might prefer to think of gap as a space-break.

Space: *the dimensional framework in which we carry out the motions of existence. The distance between, and beyond. The unknown Out There, and the unknown Inside. An emptiness to be filled, a blankness to be filled in, an absolute intangible: we make it our metaphor, analogy, for even less concrete imperatives, think of it as an 'objective' reality, speak of it like something to be cut up, sliced, boxed in, stretched out. (Close the lid on an empty shoebox. Measure precisely the 'volume of space' contained. Pick up the box; put it on a shelf. Tell me if it still contains the same space.) The planet spins, whirls, whizzes through space, and we retain the odd illusion that we exist inside measurable coordinates — parceling out plots of land, arguing proprietary rights in the very atmosphere clinging to the square of deeded ground, as though it were a 'known' volume of real space.*

"Playing the game of reality with no real cards in one's hands," says Dr. Laing.

They Do Not Always Remember William Burroughs

It was in Monterrey Mexico ... a square a fountain a café. I had stopped by the fountain to make an entry in my notebook: 'dry fountain empty square silver paper in the wind frayed sounds of a distant city'.

"What have you written there?" I looked up. A man was standing in front of me barring the way. He was corpulent but hard-looking with a scared red face and pale grey eyes. He held out his hand as if presenting a badge but the hand was empty. In the same movement he took the notebook out of my hands.

"You have no right to do that. What I write in a notebook is my business. Besides I don't believe you are a police officer."

Several yards away I saw a uniformed policeman thumbs hooked in his belt. "Let's see what he has to say about this."

We walked over to the policeman. The man who had stopped me spoke rapidly in Spanish and handed him the notebook. The policeman leafed through it. I was about to renew my protests but the policeman's manner was calm and reassuring. He handed the notebook back to me said something to the other man who went back and stood by the fountain.

"You have time for a coffee *señor*?" the policeman asked. "I will tell you a story. Years ago in this city there were two policemen who were friends and shared the same lodgings. One was Rodriguez. He was content to be a simple *agente* as you see me now. The other was Alfaro. He was brilliant, ambitious and rose rapidly in the force until he was second in command. He introduced new methods ... tape recorders ... speech prints. He even studied telepathy and took a drug once which he thought would enable him to detect the criminal mind. He did not hesitate to take action where more discreet officials preferred to look the other way ... the opium fields ... the management of public funds ... bribery in the police force ... the behavior of policemen off-duty. *Señor* he put through a rule that any police officer drunk and carrying a pistol would have his pistol permit canceled for one flat year and what is more he enforced the rule. Needless to say he made enemies. One night he received a phone call and left the apartment he still shared with Rodriguez ... he had never married and preferred to live simply you understand ... just there by the fountain he was struck by a car ... an accident? perhaps ... for months he lay in a coma between life and death ... he recovered finally ... perhaps it

would have been better if he had not." The policeman tapped his forehead "You see the brain was damaged ... a small pension ... he is a major of police and sometimes the old Alfaro is there. I recall an American tourist, cameras slung all over him like great tits protesting waving his passport. There he made a mistake. I looked at the passport and did not like what I saw. So I took him along to the *comisaria* where it came to light the passport was forged the American tourist was a Dane wanted for passing worthless checks in twenty-three countries including Mexico. A female impersonator from East St. Louis turned out to be an atomic scientist wanted by the F.B.I, for selling secrets to the Chinese. Yes thanks to Alfaro I have made important arrests. More often I must tell to some tourist once again the story of Rodriguez and Alfaro." He took a toothpick out of his mouth and looked meditatively at the end of it.

"I think Rodriguez has his Alfaro and for every Alfaro there is always a Rodriguez. They do not always remember." He tapped his forehead. "You will pay the coffee yes?"

I put a note down on the table. Rodriguez snatched it up. "This note is counterfeit *señor*. You are under arrest."

"But I got it from American Express two hours ago!"

"Mentiras! You think we Mexicans are so stupid? No doubt you have a suitcase full of this filth in your hotel room." Alfaro was standing by the table smiling. He showed a police badge. "I am the F.B.I. *señor* ... the Federal Police of Mexico. Allow me." He took the note and held it up to the light smiling he handed it back to me. He said something to Rodriguez who walked out and stood by the fountain. I noticed for the first time that he was not carrying a pistol. Alfaro looked after him shaking his head sadly. "You have time for a coffee *señor*? I will tell you a story."

"That's enough!" I pulled a card out of my wallet and snapped crisply "I am District Supervisor Lee of the American Narcotics Department and I am arresting you and your accomplice Rodriguez for acting in concert to promote the sale of narcotics ... caffeine among other drugs ... "

A hand touched my shoulder. I looked up. A grey-haired Irishman was standing there with calm authority the face portentous and distant as if I were recovering consciousness after a blow on the head. They do not always remember. "Go over there by the fountain, Bill. I'll look into this." I could feel his eyes on my back see the sad head shake hear him order two coffees in excellent Spanish ... dry fountain empty square silver paper in the wind frayed sounds of distant city ... everything grey and fuzzy ... my mind isn't working right ... who are you over there telling the story of Harry and Bill? ... The square clicked back into focus. My mind cleared. I walked toward the café

with calm authority.

In being aware of the bodily experience, we must thereby be aware of aspects of the whole spatio-temporal world as mirrored within the bodily life ... my theory involves the entire abandonment of the notion that simple location is the primary way in which things are involved in space-time.

(A.N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World)

... The subjective reality of fiction depends, not on the spacio-temporal coordinates assigned to it, but on the author's direct or indirect experience of reality, on his frames of reference for the interpretation of reality, on his ability to abstract and synthesise fictional experiences, and on his selection of symbolic media capable of evoking these experiences completely for his readers.

(Reginald Bretnor, Modern Science Fiction)

In his B.B.C. interview, Ballard spoke of the distinction between 'manifest' and 'latent' reality, and the necessity for portraying three distinct aspects of reality in fiction: the objective physical level, the subjective level of consciousness and perception, and the public-image level of other *people's perceptions. Too often, he pointed out, we dismiss as 'fictional' many elements of our environment which have attained projective reality in spite of their fictional origins. The fact is, a television spectacle is as real a part of one's experience as a walk down the street; nor does the memory of a hallucination differ intrinsically from the memory of a fireworks display.*

The Winter Flies
Fritz Leiber

After the supper dishes were done there was a general movement from the Adler kitchen to the Adler living room.

It was led by Gottfried Helmuth Adler, commonly known as Gott. He was thinking how they should be coming from a dining room, yes, with coloured maids, not from a kitchen. In a large brandy snifter he was carrying what had been left in the shaker from the martinis, a colourless elixir weakened by melted ice yet somewhat stronger than his wife was supposed to know. This monster drink was a regular part of Gott's carefully thought-out program for getting safely through the end of the day.

"After the seventeenth hour of creation God got sneaky," Gott Adler once put it to himself.

He sat down in his leather-upholstered easy chair, flipped open *Plutarch's Lives* left-handed, glanced down through the lower halves of his executive bifocals at the paragraph in the biography of Caesar he'd been reading before dinner, then, without moving his head, looked through the upper halves back toward the kitchen.

After Gott came Jane Adler, his wife. She sat down at her drawing table, where pad, pencils, knife, art gum, distemper paints, water, brushes, and rags were laid out neatly.

Then came little Heinie Adler, wearing a spaceman's transparent helmet with a large hole in the top for ventilation. He went and stood beside this arrangement of objects: first a long wooden box about knee-high with a smaller box on top and propped against the latter a toy control panel of blue and silver plastic, on which only one lever moved at all; next, facing the panel, a child's wooden chair; then back of the chair another long wooden box lined up with the first.

"Goodbye Mama, goodbye Papa." Heinie called. "I'm going to take a trip in my spaceship."

"Be back in time for bed," his mother said.

"Hot jets!" murmured his father.

Heinie got in, touched the control panel twice, and then sat motionless in the little wooden chair, looking straight ahead.

A fourth person came into the living room from the kitchen — the Man in the Black Flannel Suit. He moved with the sick jerkiness and had the slack putty-gray features of a figure of the imagination that hasn't been fully developed. (There was a fifth person in the house, but even Gott didn't know about him yet.) The Man in the Black

Flannel Suit made a stiff gesture at Gott and gaped his mouth to talk to him, but the latter silently writhed his lips in a "Not yet, you fool!" and nodded curtly toward the sofa opposite his easy chair.

"Gott," Jane said, hovering a pencil over the pad, "you've lately taken to acting as if you were talking to someone who isn't there."

"I have, my dear?" her husband replied with a smile as he turned a page, but not lifting his face from his book. "Well, talking to oneself is the sovereign guard against madness."

"I thought it worked the other way," Jane said.

"No," Gott informed her.

Jane wondered what she should draw and saw she had very faintly sketched on a small scale the outlines of a child, done in sticks-and-blobs like Paul Klee or kindergarten art. She could do another 'Children's Clubhouse', she supposed, but where should she put it this time?

The old electric clock with brass fittings that stood on the mantel began to wheeze shrilly, "Mystery, mystery, mystery, mystery." It struck Jane as a good omen for her picture. She smiled.

Gott took a slow pull from his goblet and felt the scentless vodka bite just enough and his skin shiver and the room waver pleasantly for a moment with shadows chasing across it. Then he swung the pupils of his eyes upward and looked across at the Man in the Black Flannel Suit, noting with approval that he was sitting rigidly on the sofa. Gott conducted his side of the following conversation without making a sound or parting his lips more than a quarter of an inch, just flaring his nostrils from time to time.

black flannel: Now if I may have your attention for a space, Mr. Adler —

gott: Speak when you're spoken to! Remember, I created you.

black flannel: I respect your belief. Have you been getting any messages?

gott: The number 6669 turned up three times today in orders and estimates. I received an airmail advertisement beginning 'Are you ready for big success?' though the rest of the ad didn't signify. As I opened the envelope the minute hand of my desk clock was pointing at the faceless statue of Mercury on the Commerce Building. When I was leaving the office my secretary droned at me, "A representative of the Inner Circle will call on you tonight," though when I questioned her, she claimed that she'd said, "Was the letter to Innes-Burkel and Company all right?" Because she is aware of my deafness, I could hardly challenge her. In any case she sounded sincere. If those were messages from the Inner Circle, I received them. But seriously I doubt the existence of that clandestine organisation. Other explanations seem to me more likely — for instance, that I am developing a

psychosis. I do not believe in the Inner Circle.

black flannel *(smiling shrewdly — his features have grown tightly handsome though his complexion is still putty gray)*: Psychosis is for weak minds. Look, Mr. Adler, you believe in the Mafia, the FBI, and the Communist Underground. You believe in upper-echelon control groups in unions and business and fraternal organisations. You know the workings of big companies. You are familiar with industrial and political espionage. You are not wholly unacquainted with the secret fellowships of munitions manufacturers, financiers, dope addicts and procurers and pornography connoisseurs and the brotherhoods and sisterhoods of sexual deviates and enthusiasts. Why do you boggle at the Inner Circle?

gott *(coolly)*: I do not wholly believe in all of those other organisations. And the Inner Circle still seems to me more of a wish-dream than the rest. Besides, you may want me to believe in the Inner Circle in order at a later date to convict me of insanity.

black flannel *(drawing a black briefcase from behind his legs and unzipping it on his knees)*: Then you do not wish to hear about the Inner Circle?

gott *(inscrutably)*: I will listen for the present. Hush!

Heinie was calling out excitedly, "I'm in the stars, Papa! They're so close they burn!" He said nothing more and continued to stare straight ahead.

"Don't touch them," Jane warned without looking around. Her pencil made a few faint five-pointed stars. The Children's Clubhouse would be on a boundary of space, she decided — put it in a tree on the edge of the Old Ravine. She said, "Gott, what do you suppose Heinie sees out there besides stars?"

"Bug-eyed angels, probably," her husband answered, smiling again but still not taking his head out of his book.

black flannel *(consulting a sheet of crackling black paper he has slipped from his briefcase, though as far as Gott can see there is no printing, typing, writing, or symbols of any sort in any colour ink on the black bond)*: The Inner Circle is the world's secret elite, operating behind and above all figureheads, workhorses, wealthy dolts, and those talented exhibitionists we name genius. The Inner Circle has existed *sub rosa niger* for thousands of years. It controls human life. It is the repository of all great abilities, and they key to all ultimate delights.

gott *(tolerantly)*: You make it sound plausible enough. Everyone half believes in such a cryptic power gang, going back to Sumeria.

black flannel: The membership is small and very select. As you are aware, I am a kind of talent scout for the group. Qualifications for admission *(he slips a second sheet of black bond from his briefcase)*

include a proven great skill in achieving and wielding power over men and women, an amoral zest for all of life, a seasoned blend of ruthlessness and reliability, plus wide knowledge and lightning wit.

gott *(contemptuously)*: Is that all?

black flannel *(flatly)*: Yes. Initiation is binding for life — and for the afterlife: one of our mottos is Ferdinand's dying cry in *The Duchess of Malfi*. "I will vault credit and affect high pleasures after death." The penalty for revealing organisational secrets is not death alone but extinction — all memory of the person is erased from public and private history; his name is removed from records; all knowledge of and feeling for him is deleted from the minds of his wives, mistresses, and children: it is as if he had never existed. That, by the by, is a good example of the powers of the Inner Circle. It may interest you to know, Mr. Adler, that as a result of the retaliatory activities of the Inner Circle, the names of three British kings have been expunged from history. Those who have suffered a like fate include two popes, seven movie stars, a brilliant Flemish artist superior to Rembrandt ... *(As he spins out an apparently interminable listing, the Fifth Person creeps in on hands and knees from the kitchen. Gott cannot see him at first, as the sofa is between Gott's chair and the kitchen door. The Fifth Person is the Black Jester, who looks rather like a caricature of Gott but has the same putty complexion as the Man in the Black Flannel Suit. The Black Jester wears skin-tight clothing of that colour, silver-embroidered boots and gloves, and a black hood edged with silver bells that do not tinkle. He carries a scepter topped with a small death's-head that wears a black hood like his own edged with tinier silver bells, soundless as the larger ones.)* **the black jester** *(suddenly rearing up like a cobra from behind the sofa and speaking to the Man in the Black Flannel Suit over the latter's shoulder)*: Ho! So you're still teasing his rickety hopes with that shit about the Inner Circle? Good sport, brother! — you play your fish skillfully.

gott *(immensely startled, but controlling himself with some courage)*: Who are you? How dare you bring your brabblement into my court?

the black jester: Listen to the old cock crow innocent! As if he didn't know he'd himself created both of us, time and again, to stave off boredom, madness, or suicide.

gott *(firmly)*: I never created *you*.

the black jester: Oh, yes, you did, old cock. Truly your mind has never birthed anything but twins — for every good, a bad; for every breath, a fart; and for every white, a black.

gott *(flares his nostrils and glares a death-spell which hums toward the newcomer like a lazy invisible bee)*.

the black jester *(pales and staggers backward as the death-spell strikes, but shakes it off with an effort and glares back murderously at Gott)*: Old cock-father, I'm beginning to hate you at last.

Just then the refrigerator motor went on in the kitchen, and its loud rapid rocking sound seemed to Jane to be a voice saying, "Watch your children, they're in danger. Watch your children, they're in danger."

"I'm no ladybug," Jane retorted tartly in her thoughts, irked at the worrisome interruption now that her pencil was rapidly developing the outlines of the Clubhouse in the Tree with the moon risen across the ravine between clouds in the late afternoon sky. Nevertheless she looked at Heinie. He hadn't moved. She could see how the plastic helmet was open at neck and top, but it made her think of suffocation just the same.

"Heinie, are you still in the stars?" she asked.

"No, now I'm landing on a moon," he called back. "Don't talk to me, Mama, I've got to watch the road."

Jane at once wanted to imagine what roads in space might look like, but the refrigerator motor had said 'children', not 'child', and she knew that the language of machinery is studded with tropes. She looked at Gott. He was curled comfortably over his book, and as she watched, he turned a page and touched his lips to the martini water. Nevertheless, she decided to test him.

"Gott, do you think this family is getting too ingrown?" she said. "We used to have more people around."

"Oh, I think we have quite a few as it is," he replied, looking up innocently at the sofa, beyond it, and around at her expectantly, as if ready to join in any conversation she cared to start. But she simply smiled at him and returned relieved to her thoughts and her picture. He smiled back and bowed his head again to his book.

black flannel *(ignoring the Black Jester)*: My chief purpose in coming here tonight, Mr. Adler, is to inform you that the Inner Circle has begun a serious study of your qualifications for membership.

the black jester: At *his* age? After *his* failures? Now we curtsy forward toward the Big Lie!

black flannel *(in a pained voice)*: Really! *(Then once more to Gott.)* Point One: you have gained for yourself the reputation of a man of strong patriotism, deep company loyalty, and realistic self-interest, sternly contemptuous of all youthful idealism and rebelliousness. Point Two: you have cultivated constructive hatreds in your business life, deliberately knifing colleagues when you could, but allying yourself to those on the rise. Point Three and most important: you have gone some distance toward creating the master illusion of a man who has secret sources of information, secret new techniques for thinking more swiftly and acting more decisively than others, secret superior connections and contacts — in short, a dark new strength which all others envy even as they cringe from it.

the black jester *(in a kind of counterpoint as he advances around the sofa)*: But he's come down in the world since he lost his big job. National Motors was at least a step in the right direction, but Hagbolt-Vincent has no company planes, no company apartments, no company shooting lodges, no company call girls! Besides, he drinks too much. The Inner Circle is not for drunks on the downgrade.

black flannel: Please! You're spoiling things.

the black jester: *He's* spoiled. *(Closing in on Gott.)* Just look at him now. Eyes that need crutches for near and far. Ears that mishear the simplest remark.

gott: Keep off me, I tell you.

the black jester *(ignoring the warning)*: Fat belly, flaccid sex, swollen ankles. And a mouthful of stinking cavities! — did you know he hasn't dared visit his dentist for five years? Here, open up and show them! *(Thrusts black-gloved hand toward Gott's face.)* Gott, provoked beyond endurance, snarled aloud, "Keep off, damn you!" and shot out the heavy book in his left hand and snapped it shut on the Black Jester's nose. Both black figures collapsed instantly.

Jane lifted her pencil a foot from the pad, turned quickly, and demanded, "My God, Gott, what was that?"

"Only a winter fly, my dear," he told her soothingly. "One of the fat ones that hide in December and breed all the black clouds of spring." He found his place in Plutarch and dipped his face close to study both pages and the trough between them. He looked around slyly at Jane and said, "I didn't squish her."

The chair in the spaceship rutched. Jane asked, "What is it, Heinie?"

"A meteor exploded, Mama. I'm all right. I'm out in space again, in the middle of the road."

Jane was impressed by the time it had taken the sound of Gott's book clapping shut to reach the spaceship. She began lightly to sketch blob-children in swings hanging from high limbs in the Tree, swinging far out over the ravine into the stars.

Gott took a pull of martini water, but he felt lonely and impotent. He peeped over the edge of his Plutarch at the darkness below the sofa and grinned with new hope as he saw the huge flat blob of black putty the Jester and Flannel had collapsed into. *I'm on a black kick,* he thought, *why black?* — choosing to forget that he had first started to sculpt figures of the imagination from the star-specked blackness that pulsed under his eyelids while he lay in the dark abed: tiny black heads like wrinkled peas on which any three points of light made two eyes and a mouth. He'd come a long way since then. Now with strong rays from his eyes he rolled all the black putty he could see into a woman-long bolster and hoisted it onto the sofa. The bolster helped

with blind sensuous hitching movements, especially where it bent at the middle. When it was lying full length on the sofa he began with cruel strength to sculpt it into the figure of a high-breasted exaggeratedly sexual girl.

Jane found she'd sketched some flies into the picture, buzzing around the swingers. She rubbed them out and put in more stars instead. But there would be flies in the ravine, she told herself, because people dumped garbage down the other side; so she drew one large fly in the lower left-hand corner of the picture. He could be the observer. She said to herself firmly, *No black clouds of spring in this picture* and changed them to hints of Roads in Space.

Gott finished the Black Girl with two twisting tweaks to point her nipples. Her waist was barely thick enough not to suggest an actual wasp or a giant amazon ant. Then he gulped martini water and leaned forward just a little and silently but very strongly blew the breath of life into her across the eight feet of living-room air between them.

The phrase 'black clouds of spring' made Jane think of dead hopes and drowned talents. She said out loud, "I wish you'd start writing in the evenings again, Gott. Then I wouldn't feel so guilty."

"These days, my dear, I'm just a dull businessman, happy to relax in the heart of his family. There's not an atom of art in me," Gott informed her with quiet conviction, watching the Black Girl quiver and writhe as the creativity-wind from his lips hit her. With a sharp twinge of fear it occurred to him that the edges of the wind might leak over to Jane and Heinie, distorting them like heat shimmers, changing them nastily. Heinie especially was sitting so still in his little chair light-years away. Gott wanted to call to him, but he couldn't think of the right bit of spaceman's lingo.

the black girl *(sitting up and dropping her hand coquettishly to her crotch)*: He-he! Now ain't this something, Mr. Adler! First time you've ever had me in your home.

gott *(eyeing her savagely over Plutarch)*: Shut up!

the black girl *(unperturbed)*: Before this it was only when you were away on trips or, once or twice lately, at the office.

gott *(flaring his nostrils)*: Shut up, I say! You're less than dirt.

the black girl *(smirking)*: But I'm interesting dirt, ain't I? You want we should do it in front of her? I could come over and flow inside your clothes and — **gott**: One more word and I uncreate you! I'll tear you apart like a boiled crow. I'll squish you back to putty.

the black girl *(still serene, preening her nakedness)*: Yes, and you'll enjoy every red-hot second of it, won't you?

Affronted beyond bearing, Gott sent chopping rays at her over the Plutarch parapet, but at that instant a black figure, thin as a spider, shot up behind the sofa and reaching over the Black Girl's shoulder

brushed aside the chopping rays with one flick of a whiplike arm. Grown from the black putty Gott had overlooked under the sofa, the figure was that of an old conjure woman, stick-thin with limbs like wires and breasts like dangling ropes, face that was a pack of spearheads with black ostrich plumes a-quiver above it.

the black crone *(in a whistling voice like a hungry wind)*: Injure one of the girls. Mister Adler, and I'll castrate you, I'll shrivel you with spells. You'll never be able to call them up again, no matter how far a trip you go on, or even pleasure your wife.

gott *(frightened, but not showing it)*: Keep your arms and legs on, Mother. Flossie and I were only teasing each other. Vicious play is a specialty of your house, isn't it?

With a deep groaning cry the furnace fan switched on in the basement and began to say over and over again in a low rapid rumble, "Oh, my God, my God, my God. Demons, demons, demons, demons." Jane heard the warning very clearly, but she didn't want to lose the glow of her feelings. She asked, "Are you all right out there in space, Heinie?" and thought he nodded "Yes." She began to colour the Clubhouse in the Tree — blue roof, red walls, a little like Chagall.

the black crone *(continuing a tirade)*: Understand this, Mr. Adler, you don't own us, we own you. Because you gotta have the girls to live, you're the girls' slave.

the black girl: He-he! Shall I call Susie and Belle? They've never been here either, and they'd enjoy this.

the black crone: Later, if he's humble. You understand me, Slave? If I tell you have your wife cook dinner for the girls or wash their feet or watch you snuggle with them, then you gotta do it. And your boy gotta run our errands. Come over here now and sit by Flossie while I brand you with dry ice.

Gott quaked, for the Crone's arms were lengthening toward him like snakes, and he began to sweat, and he murmured, "God in Heaven," and the smell of fear went out of him to the walls — millions of stinking molecules.

A cold wind blew over the fence of Heinie's space road and the stars wavered and then fled before it like diamond leaves.

Jane caught the murmur and the fear-whiff too, but she was colouring the Clubhouse windows a warm rich yellow; so what she said in a rather loud, rapt, happy voice was: "I think Heaven is like a children's clubhouse. The only people there are the ones you remember from childhood — either because you were in childhood with them or they told you about their childhood honestly. The *real* people."

At the word *real* the Black Crone and the Black Girl strangled and began to bend and melt like a thin candle and a thicker one over a

roaring fire.

Heinie turned his spaceship around and began to drive it bravely homeward through the unspeckled dark, following the ghostly white line that marked the centre of the road. He thought of himself as the cat they'd had. Papa had told him stories of the cat coming back — from downtown, from Pittsburgh, from Los Angeles, from the moon. Cats could do that. He was the cat coming back.

Jane put down her brush and took up her pencil once more. She'd noticed that the two children swinging out farthest weren't attached yet to their swings. She started to hook them up, then hesitated. Wasn't it all right for some of the children to go sailing out to the stars? Wouldn't it be nice for some evening world — maybe the late-afternoon moon — to have a shower of babies? She wished a plane would crawl over the roof of the house and drone out an answer to her question. She didn't like to have to do all the wondering by herself. It made her feel guilty.

"Gott," she said, "why don't you at least finish the last story you were writing? The one about the Elephants' Graveyard." Then she wished she hadn't mentioned it, because it was an idea that had scared Heinie.

"Some day," her husband murmured, Jane thought.

Gott felt weak with relief, though he was forgetting why. Balancing his head carefully over his book, he drained the next to the last of the martini water. It always got stronger toward the bottom. He looked at the page through the lower halves of his executive bifocals and for a moment the word 'Caesar' came up in letters an inch high, each jet serif showing its tatters and the white paper its ridgy fibers. Then, still never moving his head, he looked through the upper halves and saw the long thick blob of dull black putty on the wavering blue couch and automatically gathered the putty together and with thumb-and-palm rays swiftly shaped the Old Philosopher in the Black Toga, always an easy figure to sculpt since he was never finished, but rough-hewn in the style of Rodin or Daumier. It was always good to finish up an evening with the Old Philosopher.

The white line in space tried to fade. Heinie steered his ship closer to it. He remembered that in spite of Papa's stories, the cat had never come back.

Jane held her pencil poised over the detached children swinging out from the Clubhouse. One of them had a leg kicked over the moon.

the philosopher *(adjusting his craggy toga and yawning)*: The topic for tonight's symposium is that vast container of all, the Void.

gott *(condescendingly)*: The Void? That's interesting. Lately I've wished to merge with it. Life wearies me.

A smiling dull black skull, as crudely shaped as the Philosopher

looked over the latter's shoulder and then rose higher on a rickety black bone framework.

death *(quietly, to Gott)*: Really?

gott *(greatly shaken, but keeping up a front)*: I *am* on a black kick tonight. Can't even do a white skeleton, Disintegrate, you two. You bore me almost as much as life.

death: Really? If you did not cling to life like a limpet, you would have crashed your car, to give your wife and son the insurance, when National Motors fired you. You planned to do that. Remember?

gott *(with hysterical coolness)*: Maybe I should have cast you in brass or aluminum. Then you'd at least have brightened things up. But it's too late now. Disintegrate quickly and don't leave any scraps around.

death: Much too late. Yes, you planned to crash your car and doubly indemnify your dear ones. You had the spot picked, but your courage failed you.

gott *(blustering)*: I'll have you know I am not only Gottfried but also Helmuth — Hell's Courage Adler!

the philosopher *(confused but trying to keep in the conversation)*: A most swashbuckling sobriquet.

death: Hell's courage failed you on the edge of the ravine. *(Pointing at Gott a three-fingered thumbless hand like a black winter branch)* Do you wish to die now?

gott *(blacking out visually)*: Cowards die many times. *(Draining the last of the martini water in absolute darkness.)* The valiant taste death once. Caesar.

death *(a voice in darkness)*: Coward. Yet you summoned me — and even though you fashioned me poorly, I am indeed Death — and there are others besides yourself who take long trips. Even longer ones. Trips in the Void.

the philosopher *(another voice)*: Ah, yes, the Void. Imprimis —

death: Silence.

In the great obedient silence Gott heard the unhurried click of Death's feet as he stepped from behind the sofa across the bare floor toward Heinie's spaceship. Gott reached up in the dark and clung to his mind.

Jane heard the slow clicks too. They were the kitchen clock ticking out, "Now. Now. Now. Now. Now."

Suddenly Heinie called out, "The line's gone. Papa, Mama, I'm lost."

Jane said sharply, "No, you're not, Heinie. Come out of space at once."

"I'm not in space now. I'm in the Cats' Graveyard."

Jane told herself it was insane to feel suddenly so frightened.

"Come back from wherever you are, Heinie," she said calmly. "It's time for bed."

"I'm lost, Papa," Heinie cried. "I can't hear Mama any more."

"Listen to your mother, Son," Gott said thickly, groping in the blackness for other words.

"All the Mamas and Papas in the world are dying," Heinie wailed.

Then the words came to Gott, and when he spoke his voice flowed. "Are your atomic generators turning over, Heinie? Is your space-warp lever free?"

"Yes, Papa, but the line's gone."

"Forget it. I've got a fix on you through subspace and I'll coach you home. Swing her two units to the right and three up. Fire when I give the signal. Are you ready?"

"Yes, Papa."

"Roger. Three, two, one, fire and away! Dodge that comet! Swing left around that planet! Never mind the big dust cloud! Home on the third beacon. Now! Now! Now!"

Gott had dropped his Plutarch and come lurching blindly across the room, and as he uttered the last *Now!* the darkness cleared, and he caught Heinie up from his spacechair and staggered with him against Jane and steadied himself there without upsetting her paints, and she accused him laughingly "You beefed up the martini water again," and Heinie pulled off his helmet and crowed, "Make a big hug," and they clung to each other and looked down at the half-coloured picture where a children's clubhouse sat in a tree over a deep ravine and blob children swung out from it against the cool pearly moon and the winding roads in space and the next to the last child hooked onto his swing with one hand and with the other caught the last child of all, while from the picture's lower left-hand corner a fat, black fly looked on enviously.

Searching with his eyes as the room swung toward equilibrium, Gottfried Helmuth Adler saw Death peering at him through the crack between the hinges of the open kitchen door.

Laboriously, half passing out again, Gott sneered his face at him.

'The Winter Flies' was written in 1959; sold to Esquire *shortly afterwards; returned, unpublished, some years later; finally published — in* F&SF *as 'The Inner Circles' — in 1967. All of which throws some light on the fact that Fritz Leiber appears to be the only author from the late great days of space-and-atoms predictive science fiction (mainly* Astounding, *roughly 1937-1943) who is now regularly producing short fiction in a modern s-f vein. The other forerunners are (like Kuttner) dead, or (like Sturgeon) departed for other fields.*

The suicide of Marilyn Monroe is in fact & disaster in space-time,

rather like the explosion of a satellite capsule in orbit.

It is not so much a personal disaster (though of course Marilyn Monroe committed suicide as a single woman) but a disaster of a whole complex of relationships involving this screen actress who is presented to us on a series of gigantic billboards, on a thousand magazine covers, and so on — whose body becomes part of the eternal landscape of our environment, I mean, the immense terraced figure of Marilyn Monroe stretched across a cinema hoarding is as real a portion of our external landscape as a system of mountains and lakes. ...

(*J. G. Ballard, on* The New Science Fiction)

When I First Read ...
Dick Allen

WHEN I FIRST READ THE THEORY
OF THE BLUE GALAXIES, I THOUGHT
The undulating universe
is like a belly-dancer's belly:
expanding till the skin is taut
then caving into ribs and groin.
I can scarcely comprehend
when she began and when she'll end,
I am so taken up with how
she does the hully-gully.

BUT AFTER DUE CONSIDERATION
OF THE MATTER, I SAID
To stand shock-still, examining
how flexible her stomach is,
does not become me. I resolve
myself to misbehave, rejoin
my tipsy table totallers,
compute and prophesise,
regard and analyse
and do the universal swing.

AND WHEN ALL WAS SAID AND DONE, I WROTE
It doesn't work. The telescope
is not my eye; those trickling years
of light are not my years; I once
saw pictures of the moon close-up
and prayed for cheese. I wished
I hadn't rested on my woman's belly,
inhaled, exhaled, keeping time,
and seen her lovely skin grow pores.

In America, as in England, there is a growing entente *between s-f and poetry — both 'literary' and 'pop'. Dick Allen, who teaches at the University*

of Ohio and edits the Mad River Review, *published a forceful article in* Writers' Digest *last year on the uses and usages of surrealist imagery in contemporary poetry and folkrock:*

... Surrealistic satire is much more than simple pot-dreams and fantasy ... Traditional satire — like that of Pope — presupposes reason and an ordered universe. [*Whatever*] *deviates from order and reason can be criticised. Surrealistic satire, conversely, presupposes a ... universe full of self-contradictions ... Sharing this kind of sensibility, the folkrock artist tells the older member of his society they have turned out the whole for the parts (i.e. Eliot's 'The Wasteland') and must again see with the eyes of a child before they can vision with the eyes of a man ... The modes of thought in Alice's Wonderland cannot be judged with words like 'selfish' and 'reason' The new thing here is that it is not just the poets who understand this — society has finally begun to catch up with them. ...*

The weird imagery of folk rock is communicating the new modes of apprehension ... The modern world comes at us in all directions, on all sorts of sound waves. The lyrics reflect the absurdity of a television culture which finds nothing strange in watching a deodourant commercial interrupt a bloody filmclip from Vietnam ... It is the natural aftermath, the popularisation, of a sensibility which helped produce Waiting for Godot, Dr. Strangelove, Cat's Cradle *and* Catch-22.

You: Coma: Marilyn Monroe
J. G. Ballard

He thinks of Max Ernst, Marilyn Monroe and the woman in the apartment; he conceives the 'false' space and time of the apartment; he visits the deserted planetarium; he sees Coma, the psychiatrist and the dancer; his impressions of Africa; he meditates on the persistence of the beach, the individual as an aspect of landscape; he witnesses the assumption of the sand-dune; he conceives the 'real' space and time of the apartment; he kills the woman when she occludes the interval between the 'false' and 'real'; he sees Marilyn Monroe, epiphany of this death; he leaves with Coma.

The Robing of the Bride. At noon, when she awoke, Tallis was sitting on the metal chair beside the bed, his shoulders pressed to the wall as if trying to place the greatest possible distance between himself and the sunlight waiting on the balcony like a trap. In the three days since their meeting at the beach planetarium he had done nothing but pace out the dimensions of the apartment, constructing some labyrinth from within. She sat up, aware of the absence of any sounds or movement in the apartment. He had brought with him an immense quiet. Through this glaciated silence the white walls of the apartment fixed arbitrary planes. She began to dress, aware of his eyes staring at her body. Then she realised that she was standing in his way.

Fragmentation. For Tallis, this period in the apartment was a time of increasing fragmentation. A pointless vacation had led him by some kind of negative logic to the small resort on the sand-bar. In his faded cotton suit he had sat for hours at the tables of the closed cafés, but already his memories of the beach had faded. The adjacent apartment block screened the high wall of the dunes. The young woman slept for most of the day and the apartment was silent, the white volumes of the rooms extending themselves around him. Above all, the whiteness of the walls obsessed him.

The 'Soft' Death of Marilyn Monroe. Standing in front of him as she dressed, Karen Novotny's body seemed as smooth and annealed as those frozen planes. Yet a displacement of time would drain away the soft interstices, leaving walls like scraped clinkers. He remembered Ernst's 'Robing ... ': Marilyn's pitted skin, breasts of carved pumice, volcanic thighs, a face of ash. The widowed bride of Vesuvius.

Indefinite Divisibility. At the beginning, when they had met in the deserted planetarium among the dunes, he had seized on Karen

Novotny's presence. All day he had been wandering among the sand-hills, trying to escape the apartment houses which rose in the distance above the dissolving crests. The opposing slopes, inclined at all angles to the sun like an immense Hindu yantra, were marked with the muffled ciphers left by his sliding feet. On the concrete terrace outside the planetarium the young woman in the white dress watched him approach with maternal eyes.

Enneper's Surface. Tallis was immediately struck by the unusual planes of her face, intersecting each other like the dunes around her. When she offered him a cigarette he involuntarily held her wrist, feeling the junction between the radial and ulna bones. He followed her across the dunes. The young woman was a geometric equation, the demonstration model of a landscape. Her breasts and buttocks illustrated Enneper's surface of negative constant curve, the differential coefficient of the pseudo-sphere.

False Spare and Time of the Apartment. These planes found their rectilinear equivalent in the apartment. The right angles between the walls and ceiling were footholds in a valid system of time, unlike the suffocating dome of the planetarium, expressing its infinity of symmetrical boredom. He watched Karen Novotny walk through the rooms, relating the movements of her thighs and hips to the architectonics of floor and ceiling. This cool-limbed young woman was a modulus, by multiplying her into the space and time of the apartment he would obtain a valid unit of existence.

Suite Mentale. Conversely, Karen Novotny found in Tallis a kinetic expression of her own mood of abstraction, that growing entropy which had begun to occupy her life in the deserted beach resort since the season's end. She had been conscious for some days of an increasing sense of disembodiment, as if her limbs and musculature merely established the residential context of her body. She cooked for Tallis, and washed his suit, her eyes over the ironing board watching his tall limping figure interlocking with the dimensions and angles of the apartment. Later, the sexual act between them was a dual communion between themselves and the continuum of time and space which they occupied.

The Dead Planetarium. Under a bland, equinoctial sky, the morning light lay evenly over the white concrete outside the entrance to the planetarium. Nearby the hollow basins of cracked mud were inversions of the damaged dome of the planetarium, and of the eroded breasts of Marilyn Monroe. Almost hidden by the dunes, the distant apartment blocks showed no signs of activity. Tallis waited in the deserted café terrace beside the entrance, scraping with a burnt-out match at the gull droppings that had fallen through the tattered awning on to the green metal tables. He stood up when the helicopter

appeared in the sky.

A Silent Tableau. Soundlessly the Sikorski circled the dunes, its fans driving the fine sand down the slopes. It landed in a shallow basin fifty yards from the planetarium. Tallis went forward. Dr. Nathan stepped from the aircraft, finding his feet uncertainly in the sand. The two men shook hands. After a pause, during which he scrutinised Tallis closely, the psychiatrist began to speak. His mouth worked silently, eyes fixed on Tallis. He stopped and then began again with an effort, lips and jaw moving in exaggerated spasms as if he were trying to extricate some gum-like residue from his teeth. After several intervals, when he had failed to make a single audible sound, he turned and went back to the helicopter. Without any noise it took off into the sky.

Appearance of Coma. She was waiting for him at the café terrace. As he took his seat she remarked: "Do you lipread? I won't ask what he was saying." Tallis leaned back, hands in the pockets of his freshly pressed suit. "He accepts now that I'm quite sane — at least, as far as that term goes, these days its limits seem to be narrowing. The problem is one of geometry, what these slopes and planes mean." He glanced at Coma's broadcheeked face. More and more she resembled the dead film star. What code would fit both this face and body and Karen Novotny's apartment?

Dune Arabesque. Later, walking across the dunes, he saw the figure of the dancer. Her muscular body, clad in white tights and sweater that made her almost invisible against the sloping sand, moved like a wraith up and down the crests. She lived in the apartment facing Karen Novotny's, and would come out each day to practise among the dunes. Tallis sat down on the roof of a car buried in the sand. He watched her dance, a random cipher drawing its signature across the time-slopes of this dissolving yantra, a symbol in a transcendental geometry.

Impressions of Africa. A low shoreline; air glazed like amber; derricks and jetties above brown water; the silver geometry of a petrochemical complex, a vorticist assemblage of cylinders and cubes superimposed upon the distant plateau of mountains; a single Horton sphere, enigmatic balloon tethered to the fused sand by its steel cradles; the unique clarity of the African light; fluted table lands and jigsaw bastions; the limitless neural geometry of the landscape.

The Persistence of the Beach. The white flanks of the dunes reminded him of the endless promenades of Karen Novotny's body — diorama of flesh and hillock; the broad avenues of the thighs, piazzas of pelvis and abdomen, the closed arcades of the womb. This terracing of Karen's body in the landscape of the beach in some way diminished the identity of the young woman asleep in her apartment. He walked

among the displaced contours of her pectoral girdle. What time could be read off the slopes and inclines of this inorganic musculature, the drifting planes of its face?

The Assumption of the Sand-dune. This Venus of the dunes, virgin of the time-slopes, rose above Tallis into the meridian sky. The porous sand, reminiscent of the eroded walls of the apartment, and of the dead film star, with her breasts of carved pumice and thighs of ash, diffused along its crests into the wind.

The Apartment: Real Space and Time. The white rectilinear walls, Tallis realised, were aspects of that virgin of the sand-dunes whose assumption he had witnessed. The apartment was a box-clock, a cubicular extrapolation of the facial planes of the yantra, the cheekbones of Marilyn Monroe. The annealed walls froze all the rigid grief of the actress. He had come to this apartment in a misguided attempt to prevent her suicide.

Murder. Tallis stood behind the door of the lounge, shielded from the sunlight on the balcony, and considered the white cube of the room. At intervals Karen Novotny moved across it, carrying out a sequence of apparently random acts. Already she was confusing the perspectives of the room, transforming it into a dislocated clock. She noticed Tallis behind the door and walked towards him. Tallis waited for her to leave. Her figure interrupted the junction between the walls in the corner on his right. After a few seconds her presence became an unbearable intrusion into the time-geometry of the room.

Epiphany of this Death. Undisturbed, the walls of the apartment contained the serene face of the film star, the assuaged time of the dunes.

Departure. When Coma called at the apartment Tallis rose from his chair by Karen Novotny's body. "Are you ready?" she asked. Tallis began to lower the blinds over the windows. "I'll close these — no-one may come here for a year." Coma paced around the lounge. "I saw the helicopter this morning — it didn't land." Tallis disconnected the telephone behind the white leather desk. "Perhaps Dr. Nathan has given up." Coma sat down beside Karen Novotny's body. She glanced at Tallis, who pointed to the corner. "She was standing in the angle between the walls," he said. Coma lit a cigarette and then stood up. "What do you mean? Over here?"

... People live in terms of the images they see around them. If a person exists in a city of linear and rectilinear buildings and streets, with a sky shadowed by the loom of buildings, he begins to feel himself that way. He becomes square, so as to fit in with the background. He may even have a flattop haircut in an attempt to match his environment. I think the real background is the planet Earth. Things in nature flow in an organic manner

— not force against counter force, game against game. We see more of an Art Nouveau universe, with curves and flux and flow. What we're trying to do is change man's image of himself by aesthetically altering the environment.

('The Originals', Look, *Jan. 8, 1968)*

And More Changes Still
Henri Michaux

Translated by Richard Ellmann

By force of suffering I lost the limits of my body and irresistibly gave up my shape.

I was all things: ants especially, interminably in file, laborious and yet hesitating. It was a terrific moving about. I had to devote all my attention. I soon noticed that I was not only the ants, but also their path. And after being crumbly and dusty at first, it became hard and my suffering was horrible. I expected every moment that it would explode and be hurled into space. But it held firm.

I rested as well as I could on another part of me, a softer one. This was a forest and the wind stirred it gently. But a storm blew up, and the roots, to resist the increasing wind, bored into me — a mere trifle — but went on to hook so deeply into me that it was worse than death.

A sudden fall of earth made a beach enter into me, a pebbly beach. Then it began to ruminate inside me and that summoned the sea, the sea.

Often I turned boa and, although a little troubled by the elongation, I would prepare to sleep or else I was a bison and would prepare to graze, but soon from one shoulder came a typhoon, boats were thrown into the air, the steamers wondered whether they would reach port, only SOSs could be heard.

I was sorry not to be a boa or a bison any more. A little later I had to shrink up so as to fit into a saucer. Always the changes were abrupt, everything had to be made over, and that was not worth the trouble, it would last only a few instants and yet you had to adapt yourself, and always these abrupt changes. It's not so much trouble to pass from a rhombohedron to a truncated pyramid, but it's a lot of trouble to pass from a truncated pyramid to a whale; you must know immediately how to dive, to breathe, and then the water is cold, and then you find yourself face to face with the harpooners, but I, as soon as I saw men, fled. But it so happened that I was suddenly changed into a harpooner, then I had just as long a distance to go over again. At last I succeeded in overtaking the whale, I quickly launched a well-sharpened and solid harpoon (after having first made fast and checked the rope); the harpoon darted, penetrated far into the flesh, making an enormous wound. I realised then that I was the whale, I had changed

into it again, there was a new opportunity to suffer, and I am not one to get used to suffering.

After a mad race I lost my life, then I was turned back into a boat, and when I am the boat, believe me, I take in water all over, and when things get desperate, then for sure I become captain, I try to display an attitude of sangfroid, but I'm without hope, and if in spite of everything we are saved, then I'm changed into a rope and the rope breaks and if a lifeboat is smashed right at that moment I am all its planks, I began to sink and turned to an echinoderm that didn't last more than a second, for, disabled in the midst of enemies I knew nothing about, they got me at once, devoured me alive, with those white and ferocious eyes that are found only under water, under the salt sea water which makes all wounds smart. Oh! Who will leave me be for a bit? But no, if I don't budge, I rot where I am, and if I budge it's to undergo the blows of my enemies. I don't dare make a move. Just then I throw myself out of joint to become part of a grotesque mass with a defect of equilibrium which is revealed only too soon and too clearly.

If I always changed into animal form, as a last resort I would have accustomed myself to it finally, since it's always more or less the same behavior, the same principle of action and reaction, but I'm things too (and even things would be bearable), but I'm such artificial and impalpable combinations. What a to-do when I was changed into lightning! There I have to move fast, I who always lag and never know how to come to a decision.

Oh! If I could only die once and for all! But no, I'm always found good for some new being and yet I only pull boners and lead it promptly to its destruction.

No matter, I'm immediately given a new one where my prodigious incapacity can prove itself over again.

And so always and without respite.

There are so many animals, so many plants, so many minerals. And I have already been everything so many times. But these experiments don't help me. Becoming ammonium hydrochlorate again for the thirty-second time, I still have a tendency to behave like arsenic, and, changed once more into a dog, my night-bird habits always show up.

Only rarely do I see something without experiencing this very special feeling ... *Ah yes, I've been **that*** ... I don't remember exactly, I feel it. That's why I'm particularly fond of Illustrated Encyclopedias. I turn over the pages, I turn over the pages, and I often find some satisfaction, for there are some pictures of several creatures that I've not yet been. That rests me, that's delightful, I say to myself: "I might have been this one and that one and that other has been spared me." I

heave a sign of relief. Ah! Peace!

The word is groove *and careful there, because the new edition is a verb. You can* groove on *almost anything including the things you can* groove behind, *but the latter usage is usually limited to* speed, smack, acid, grass, weed, pot, Mary Jane, hash, *and other chemical* turn-ons. *Lexicographers and jargon collectors are advised to be wary: possibly in an effort to maintain freedom of speech in an illegal zone,* head talk *has an even faster turnover of meanings than most pop jargon, and nothing specified here is likely to mean* just *the same thing by the time this book is published.* Head *itself, for instance, is already used with a completely different meaning in the phrase* to have a head — *nothing to do with hangovers, rather with philosophy.*

Or it may be that the swift-shift thing is simply an advance-guard symptom of the general effort to reach beyond the Word Barrier. I have a notion that what the 'psychedelic' people mean by 'consciousness-expanding' is that the tripper can drop out *of his customary semantic matrix,* turn on *previously unexercised nonverbal perceptions, and* tune in *to aspects of his environment invisible inside the word-spectrum.*

The French poet and painter Henri Michaux is one of the very few writers who has succeeded in the improbable effort to translate some of this kind of experience back into words. His book Miserable Miracle *(City Lights, 1963, translated by Louise Varése), a record of mescaline and marijuana experiences in words and drawings, should be a shelf-companion (less instructive, more immediate; less analytical, more poetic) to every copy of Huxley's* Doors of Perception.

In science fiction, the same impatience with the limitations of words-as-medium has led to some fascinating speculation about 'ESP', or psi *(not necessarily 'extrasensory' but specifically* nonverbal) *communication. One of the most memorable* psi *stories from the peak interest period in the fifties was Katherine MacLearn's 'Defence Mechanism'. In recent years, Miss MacLean has published very little: she was back at school studying clinical psychology; this is one of the first of the new ones.*

The Other
Katherine Maclean

Tree shadows moved on the grey linoleum of the hospital floor, swaying like real leaves and twigs. Joey blurred his eyes to make the leaf shadows green.

The floor quivered slightly to foam-padded footsteps, and a man-shaped shadow appeared across the sunlight. That was Dr. Armstrong. He was kind. He always walked softly and then stood and shuffled when he hoped you would notice him.

The feet shuffled hopefully. When Joey concentrated on the doctor's shadow he could turn the head part pink, like a face.

Dr. Armstrong's voice said something. It was a pleasant light tenor voice, a little anxious.

"What did he say?" Joey asked the Other, the one in his head who listened and calculated and explained.

"He asked *How are you*?"

"What did he mean?"

"He wants you to get up and be busy, like him," said the cool advice of his Other, his guardian and advisor. "That's what they all want."

"Not right now. I am watching the leaves. What shall we tell him?"

"Tell him, *Just about the same"*

Joey made the effort, and spoke, hearing his own voice very close to his ears. He was ready to turn and look out the window now, but the doctor's feet were beside him, anxiously demanding his attention, afraid he would turn away.

"What did he say?" Joey asked the Other.

There was a pause, a barrier, a reluctance to speak, then the cool voice answered. "He asked about me."

"Was he — " Joey was alarmed. People meddled, people said things which got inside and hurt. And yet Dr. Armstrong had always been nice, he never criticised, so far. "No — I don't want to know. Well — tell me a little."

The voice was indistinct. "Asked who you talk to — when you ... before talking outside to him."

"Tell him it's you," Joey said, confident and warm. The voice was his friend, and Dr. Armstrong was his friend. They should know each other. The voice helped Dr. Armstrong. "Tell him it's you."

"What name? Authority people need names for existing things.

They don't understand without names."

"What are you?"

"I am a construct. You made me."

"We can't tell him that. People punish me for making up people." Joey felt pain in his middle, near stomach and heart. It was hard to breathe. "Mommee shouted and cried."

"We won't tell him that," the voice agreed.

Joey felt calmer. The voice was good, there had to be a good name for it, one that the outside others would approve. "We can find a name for you. There are so many words. What else are you?"

"I am part your mother and your father and little parts and feelings of anyone who ever worried about you and wanted you to stop doing things so that you would be all right and strangers would not be angry at you. And you made me into a grownup to talk to you. Many years. I've grown wise, Joey. I worry about you and want you to stop ... "

"Don't bother me about that now," Joey said, withdrawing himself in his head so that the voice was far away where he would not have to listen. "You explain to Dr. Armstrong that you are on his side, that you are grownup like him, and tell me what to do. I wouldn't know when to get up, or what people want ... They would be angry."

"Doctors don't want to talk to me. They want to talk to you, Joey. They don't ask how to do something; they ask what do you feel."

"I can't talk. They'd see me. I'd cry, and want to touch arms and rub cheeks. Talk for me. Tell them you're a doctor. Use their words."

Joey heard his voice close but too quiet and mumbly. He forced it louder. " ... *Father image, Dr. Armstrong. He tells me what is right to say. He is strict, so it is all right."*

That sounded good. That sounded safe to say. Joey heard the musical tenor of Dr. Armstrong's anxious, well-intentioned voice. It would be praise.

"Don't listen to it, Joey. It's not — "

Pain and grief struck him in the middle, curling him over. Got to get away quickly or die. Make it not happen. Into the past, in the dark, in the comforting dark, before people could take away their love. He was lying on the floor, curled up, and the warm dark was wrapping around like a blanket.

But the feet still stood by, shuffling nervously. That past event must be finished before it could be forgotten. Joey took a deep breath, made a shouting effort, heard his distant scream and left it behind, screaming forever like a soundless sign on the wall of a deserted train station, at a distant place in time.

"He said the wrong thing. Tell him to go away."

Outside-people do not know the roads and paths inside the world

of image, memory, and dream: they stumble, blunder and destroy among the fragile things. He decided that he should not have listened and replied. When time came around to return from darkness to the world of light, he would be silent.

Doctor Armstrong, twenty-four years old, successful and considered brilliant, walked into his small office in the hospital. He carefully shut the door behind him and made sure his latch had caught before sitting at his desk.

He put his face down into his hands. *(He said the wrong thing. Tell him to go away.)* The article about Rosen's techniques had said that Rosen talked freely with his patients, discussing their fantasy worlds with them as if they were real, and explaining the meaning of the symbols to them. Perhaps he should see it demonstrated before trying it again.

God! Joey had fallen from the chair and hit the floor already curled up, knees to chin, eyes shut, as if stunned and dead. Maybe he would be all right. Tomorrow, casual inquiry to the nurses ... The nurses might blame him for Joey. How many other mistakes did they blame him for already?

Why was he sitting like this with his face in his hands?

I'm tired, he thought. *Just tired.*

Doctor Armstrong leaned his face more heavily into his hands, his elbows braced on the desk as though they were tired. Tears trickled down between his spread fingers and splashed on the psychiatric journal on his desk.

It is not I who is weeping, he thought. *I am the cool and logical student, the observer of human actions. I can observe myself also, which proves that my body weeps. This wastes time I could use to study and to think.*

Tears trickled down between his spread fingers and splashed on the psychiatric journal.

It is not I who is weeping, he thought. *It is that other, the childish feeling in me, who can be wounded by love and hope, a pity and confusion, and being alone. I am an adult, a scientist. It is the other who weeps, the ungrownup one we must conceal from the world.*

"No one sees you," he said to the Other. *"You can weep for five minutes. This spasm will pass."*

We can see other people's behaviour, but not their experience. This has led some people to insist that psychology has nothing to do with the other person's experience but only with his behaviour.

The other person's behaviour is an experience of mine. My behaviour is an experience of the other. The task of social phenomenology is to relate

my experience of the other's behaviour to the other's experience of my behaviour. Its study is the relation between experience and experience; its true field is inter-experience.

(R. D. Laing, The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise)

Carol Emshwiller is the wife of the experimental moviemaker, and s-f illustrator, Ed Emshwiller. Like Katherine MacLean, she began as a writer of (outstanding but) conventional science-fiction — then stopped publishing for several years, while her work underwent an extraordinary development. In the last two years, new series of distinctive individual character have appeared in Transatlantic Review, City, Cavalier, *and the anthology* Dangerous Visions.

Chicken Icarus
Carol Emshwiller

I keep thinking there must be some place for me somewhere. I keep thinking of some kind of gelatin land, some puddingly spot all viscous, muculent, where the air is thick and wet as water. I wouldn't even ask to be able to fly around in it. I'd be happy just to ooze along the bottom as long as it was nothing like floors or mattresses or pillows. But the way it is around here you can get pretty bored with gravity.

"Down with downness," I say.

I keep thinking about this sticky-slippery kind of land but I think about legs too, a lot more than I think about arms. I don't know why. Maybe because I always hear walking sounds. Around the house I hear the floors creak and thump, accepting feet. Outside, the lady's heels tick-tock, tick-tock, measuring out time in distance covered. Steps per minute about sixty-five, breaths twenty, heartbeats seventy-two. It takes me ten heartbeats to cross my mattress. Rolling. Well, more like five heartbeats or four. Four little bird heartbeats. (I exaggerate myself, but sometimes I feel pretty exaggerated.) Doorknobs, on/off switches, buttons, zippers, drawer pulls, toe-nail scissors, the little thumb screws that hold my reading stand, the handles on the sides of my mattress, the armholes of my shirt, even birds ... When they sit along the wires they remind me of feet, robins-red-breasted feet cut off just above the ankle; flying, they remind me of feather fingered hands flip-flopping themselves into the sky, palms down. For them the air is thick enough.

But I have one thing.

When I was young I felt the world two ways, by mouth and by that one impetuous finger (I cannot say between my legs) that would rise up in curiosity at any interesting texture or temperature. Now it seems not so inquisitive. But then, it has already tested cotton, wool, wood, paper, the wall, the floor, the reading stand and so forth. It has ventured, (omnivorous can one say?) into holes in the sheet. It has examined the interior of a velvet purse (silk lined). It has pushed a toy car. It has entered a shoe. All this in its younger days.

There is, in my world also — well, it isn't really *my* world. As I said, mine would have to be a lot slushier. Anyway, I've got balance, rolling, flopping and the arching of the back. Balance I have never completely mastered. I suppose I should mention other small diversions such as defecating, urinating, the blinking of eyes, the

wiggling of ears and watching TV, And I've got drama too. Down the hall at five o'clock or so comes Mrs. Number One all dressed up like a nurse. I think I must, at some time, have been bought outright, else why does she keep me on like this? She doesn't get paid any more. Who would pay her? And what do I give in exchange for the emptying of bed pans or a lift into the bathroom, for food so considerately cut up so I can feed myself? Why, only what I can give. She likes it with brute force. "Rape, rape," she says, but not loud enough to attract attention outside of my little room.

I bounce her on the point of my one and only (or she makes me believe I do). Actually, I couldn't rape an. old glove. At the time I think I would not trade this one for any other protuberance, but afterwards I think two legs are well worth one of these.

However, the price is too high. If I had three of them it might be possible to come to some terms, but one, even as well functioning as this ... No sale!

Rape, rape, to me was Run, run.

That day (the day she locked the door and said, "If you ever tell ... " But there wasn't anybody *to* tell. I think I was forgotten the moment I was born.) — that day I thought I knew what running felt like. This was skimming over the earth, rampant, halfway to the ceiling with only the soles of the feet touching bottom. This was one foot, lightly, before the other, the swing of the leg underneath, the body riding smoothly on top of it all (amazing), the counter-balancing arms, back and forth, the toes giving a last pushoff, the knee raised, bent, the foot circling upward, pivoting out, falling ahead to catch the ground, then pushing off again, and so on. Hundreds of take-offs, and that's what this was too, a hundred take-offs until I flew into the air, but I came to rest again, flat upon the mattress.

I suppose she was grateful. One of us was.

She has been my nurse since God-knows-when, since before I knew what a calendar was or that time was anything but fresh sheets now and then. I must have been about ten, a backward, slobbery ten when she came, squashing about on her nursing shoes. She squeaks when she turns. She bites into the floor, squashily saw-toothed, as if she felt as I do about the surfaces of things. Maybe she wanted me to have a better view of those aqueous soles of hers because the first thing she did was to have my mattress put upon the floor. I admit I gained in freedom and that my distances could then be measured. I learned that the wearing down at the heel was a long time.

But Mrs. Number One isn't the only person in my life. There is a Miss Number Two, oh yes, and quite beautiful, too. Miss Spanish eyes, Miss — I wonder if it would make any difference if Mrs. Number One were beautiful — Miss White Gloves (the white gloves just in case she

might, by some mistake, touch me). She came to me fresh from racing cars, mountain tops, airplanes, at least it seemed so to me, but I see things from a floorish point of view. Everything may look like that from here.

What she brought first were the ABCs, then *Run, Tom, Run,* then *The Easy to Read Book of Far Away Places,* and all the way up to books-of-the-month and Shakespeare.

I think that Miss Number Two is, most probably, my sister.

Not that there's ever been anything sisterly-brotherly between us, but I have a hundred clues. The most obvious, that she's always been around, one way or another, in a sneaky way even before she came to me with her books and that Nefertiti tip of her head. I remember a breezy kid not much younger than myself in a tree outside my window, blue jeans, red shirt, sticking out her tongue at me, and I happy that the gesture was one I could return. Now and again I remember a furious voice from some other part of the house screeching for her to "Get down, my God, get down." I remember an eye, brown, lustrous, like a little mouse nose waiting at the crack in the door, sometimes during my bath. I even remember the knob turning and the door opening to make that crack. Later a decision was made, out of a sense of obligation or out of resentment, and she, or someone else, decided and she came to me, I cannot say with happiness. I think I was happier before, and then, with five o'clock drama, everything might have seemed complete to me. No, it wasn't happiness and she knew it.

And yet I count on her for my salvation. If anyone is going to rescue me I know it will have to be bold Miss Number Two and, even though I first approached Mrs. Number One, it is Number Two I had in mind all the time. I was afraid. I was in such a cold sweat of hope that I didn't dare to go to Number Two and I didn't even mention to Number One what I really had in mind.

What a vision I had then ... I still have. I see myself in a bright and revealing costume, all Harlequin colours and diamond shapes. I am in a stall with streamers, festoons and flags, American flags ... no, flags of all nations. I belong to the world. Loud speakers on the roof send out fanfares interspersed with Handel's Fireworks music and I, highlighted with a pinkish spotlight, perform upon my mattress such movements as I can perform (and many of these require the utmost skill and concentration). After the day's work, and I do think I can call it work, I see myself in a close and comfortable association with the rubber man, the fat lady, the human pin cushion and the half-man/ half-woman.

Though I have this grand vision in mind, and really even grander than this for I see myself as a champion of champions, though I have

this vision, I decided that I would ask only that Mrs. Number One should borrow a camera and should take a dozen pictures of me from various angles and in various poses.

I thought I could not only use these in some way as an advertisement of myself, but also to get some real idea of myself since I had, so far, never seen myself in any way at all. It was from the pictures that I thought I could make my further decisions about my future. It's true that it's hard to be really self-evaluating but I thought I might judge well enough if I detracted a certain percentage for too much self-love and another equal percentage for self-hate. The good thing about photographs would be that any initial shock I might have at my first real view of myself could be gotten over by getting used to the pictures. I felt I might get enlargements made and I would have Number One tack some along the walls and I promised myself I would make no decisions whatsoever for at least two weeks of living with them. Then I hoped to be able to look at myself with a truly cold eye.

She agreed. No arguments. Not a blink or shiver. No ambiguous glances, irresolute phrases or imponderable sighs. "Okay," she said, and yet days passed and nothing happened. Finally I approached her firmly, my eyes as my only weapon though they couldn't even stop her bustling about, swishing away nonexistent spots on the dresser front, picking little black threads off the rug. Yes, even at my five o'clock drama she is all business, that busy business of getting herself 'raped' by me. Maybe she thinks it's part of her job, and yet now she keeps me all on her own as if I am something she dressed up to amuse herself with, nothing but her backroom dildo.

Maybe this sex is *my* job.

But suppose I was inherited after my mother's death. Did I come with the house? A condition of its ownership? And I wonder if my mother, herself, could have paid for that first time? Or Miss Number Two? Did Mrs. Number One really say not to tell?

Impossible to know whose obligation this drama is, mine or Mrs. Number One's. No use wondering. I'll keep on doing my duty, or she hers, and I don't think that I, at least, will ever be able to find out. (But if I had anything more than just this one thing, then I could. One dactylic protuberance more to pit against the other in some way, one threat, one appeasement, one offering, one retreat, one gesture, one decline, one weapon other than this one, then I could find out who is the willing one and who the slave.) However ...

... at this time I said to her that I believed she had no intention of going through with this photography business at all.

What I lacked, she told me then ... "probably due to your environment ... you can't be expected ... so naïve ... not like the rest of us ... " and so on and on. What I lacked, it all came down to, was Good

Taste, capital G, capital T, otherwise I would have known that a picture of myself would be an Oh-so-gross violation of propriety and could certainly serve no good purpose either to others or to me, so, she said, she had decided from the beginning not to do it for my own good (as well as for everyone's) but I had been so forceful, so firm, she hadn't known how to argue with me ... at that time, at least. She was, of course, terribly sorry about the whole thing. But, besides, what would the man who printed the pictures say? Chances were he wouldn't return them. Society sees to such things, she said. There are censors at work, even on photos, whether I knew it or not. (Can I, somehow, be lewd simply existing like this? Do I lie here on my sheets, pornographic everyday? But hasn't everyone got his pornographic parts?) At times like these, grasping at distracting details, I watch her nose point out her line of sight. Look ahead, it tells me, but life surely cannot be as earnest as most noses would have it to be. Yet it is from this eager nose that I got the idea of asking to see my mother. I thought I might have more courage to speak out to someone I didn't know as well.

"Your mother," Number One said, "leads a comfortable life. She has surrounded herself with loveliness." (This I understand now much more than I did then, for it was to me that Mother willed many of her nice things. A handsome Louis XVI table is now against my far wall, above it hangs a print of Madame Vigée-Lebrun and her daughter [all arms], upon it is a small statue of Hermes that used to be a salt and pepper holder.) At this time, however, my room was more simply furnished. The mattress on the floor, the books lined up beside it, each with a little leather pull so I can grab it with my teeth — a slow process, finding one's page — book holder, chest of drawers, eating stand, not a single ornament unless you can call decorative a pinkish little creature Miss Number Two had brought me. She often brings things, all sorts, once a covered glass with three grasshoppers, once a white mouse, once a wounded bird. I suppose for my education, yet they give me great pleasure. This time she had been to the beach and had thought of me and brought back a jar of sea water with a starfish in it. (Even though there is no friendship or love between us, I am well aware that she constantly thinks of me. What must it be like to have me curled up at the back of your mind? Seeing everything as though through my eyes? Thinking that I have not walked upon this sand nor felt the edges of these grasses grate against my ankles? That I have not smelled the dried foam on the rocks? And never will? And so she brings these creatures to give me a realisation that she herself has already. But I have always wondered, does she do it to torment me, as she may have brought the reading and the *Book of Far Away Places?* Does she do it for the torments of understanding so that I will come at

last to *really* know?) The starfish gave me the most pleasure of all.

When I finally did convince Number One to arrange for a visit with my mother (during which Number One would be present, of course, since she feels herself a guardian of Good Taste, but I was ready to be the essence of propriety), this jar lay on the far corner of my eating stand. I would move my smallest pillow to the near edge of the stand and rest my chin there and watch the starfish feel its preposterously slow way along the glass. Note the suckers along the undersides of the starfish fingers. You might say they are the starfish's tiny army. Commands move across them like a wind, a very slow wind, that is, over grass. Move, suck, release, and each starts a little after the one next to it.

This was not my first starfish, though the largest, and I have come to know them intimately. I have learned to love them in a way that I have not loved any other creature. I have thought: What if I had this army for my own? If this were my hand? My little suckers all along the palm? I have thought I might button a button, blow my nose, answer a telephone, turn out the light. I have thought I might feel my way across the floor, this star on the end of some long radius and ulna. I might risk the stairs, letting myself down, reaching lower and letting myself down again. I could run away, and even if it took all night, moving at a starfish pace, to get as far as the next house, I might find a hiding place to spend the day and set out farther the next night, each day finding a hovel or a thicket to rest in, never discovered, ever onward by silver moonlight.

Later, this same starfish was dried and it is still here upon my low shelf. I once felt it with my tongue and now I know the sea tastes of sauerkraut.

I insisted that I be dressed up for the interview in my best shirt and even a tie, though I never wore one; also, I never had the top button of my shirt buttoned, for you can imagine to what uses I have to put my neck. I wished, then, I had a jacket and a pair of real pants for the occasion. I thought they might be stretched out beyond me and a pair of shoes stuck into the pants legs. After all, so much of what we do is for show; why not, out of deference, do a little something extra? But Number One thought not. Still, she arranged a quilt very prettily up around my waist, made tea, brought out a box of pastries, combed my hair, wiped the sweat off my forehead. A pity I had no toes to tap, no knuckles to suck nervously, hardly anything to fidget until she came, but I chewed on my upper lip and posed myself as calmly and as aesthetically as I could manage, twisting slightly in a sort of reclining contraposto.

And so Mother came in. She was wearing one of those basic blacks with a silver necklace and one could see at a glance that she

was chock-full of cultivated charm. Sedate, nothing flashy or overdone. She crossed her legs and her little skirt snuggled up around her thighs, bonneting her stockinged knees, which leaned together like two nuns, a bit of white slip peeping out beside their cheeks. (Could she really be all this and pious too?) I felt quite untidy beside them even in my best expression.

"Tea ... a cake? ... Disturbing news of Cuba ... Yes, South America is so revolutionary ... Cold for fall ... an early frost ... I was wondering ... "

I remember best her feet (this is not unusual, considering my low position here upon my mattress) in little black pumps reflecting the squares of the window and reminding me of Number One's nose ... something classical about them both, I guess. I would have liked to press my tongue across the shine of the shoes ... well, yes and the nose too. (I still wonder what their flavors might have been, the nose, certainly vanilla or apple, the shoes a red-winy taste soured by the sidewalks.) (I do often wonder if *they* can appreciate flavors as I do, if *they* even know the real pleasures of eating. Certainly they have too many diversions and, though as babies they tested things as I test them, I am sure that, by now, they have forgotten the joys and understandings of tongue and lip.) Mother, pressing her dactyls into ladyfingers in a useless proliferation, had just said the view from my window was the best in the house and I had just said that I had been thinking about my future and would like to have her help, at least for some of the details, until I could get started on my own. "Future," Mother said, just at that moment glancing down, and then she saw it. She forgot the studied beauty of the classical smile, the corners of the mouth faintly Ionic but not yet Corinthian and she forgot to watch out for those knees under that tight skirt of hers. Her eyes saw a wound ... some horrible wound of the genitals, lustrous, blistered, purple. (And yet I suppose exposed genitals, pure and simple, healthily blooming and blushing, would do to describe her stunned and outraged look.) And my starfish was firm-bodied, beautifully turgid and a rosy, tan-pink colour.

"What is that thing?" The way she said *thing,* to flush it down the toilet was too good for it, though she would certainly want to dispose of it as quickly as one would dispose of a particularly hairy spider ... Still, nothing hairy here.

The starfish reclined (one might say) near the top of the jar, one finger hidden by the punctured lid, one stretched languidly sideways along the ridge where the glass curved, and three almost straight down. Infinitesimally, one of the lower fingers was edging upwards. I don't believe Mother could have noticed this movement and certainly she couldn't have had time to examine or understand the waving

suckers, yet gall touched her tongue and even her knees paled. I saw she saw the world in that jar, caught in that abyss, sour sea water all over it, and she, without wanting to, drinking its juices ... or me. Was it me she thought she looked at? Opposites reflecting each other, he all digits and he of none, or rather one? Whichever it was, I saw, in the shape of her lips, that the taste of death (or life) was on them and I held my breath.

That's the last I ever saw of her; isn't that strange? Those rejecting lips and then the shoes departing in uneven clocks, for though she was hardly half as old as Number One (but I must admit Number One keeps up her strength extraordinarily well, rinses it in, I suppose, with the henna of her hair, or sucks it from me with that avid, other mouth. I do age fast) — for though she was hardly half — as I said — Mother, who refused ever after that to come into my room, died a year later. One could say that she faced her moment of truth with a starfish.

And so, after all, I have been forced into approaching Miss Number Two whom, as I've already mentioned, I really felt to be my only salvation from the beginning, but instead of photographs (I had started with Number Two in exactly the same way I started with Number One in spite of the mention of a censor) — not understanding what I had in mind at all, instead of photographs, Number Two brought me a mirror, a rather large hand mirror, round and with a blue cast to the glass.

I was surprised to find that I had a handsome, rather noble head. No reactions, no expressions on any of the faces of those that had appeared before me had ever led me to believe that this might be. In fact, I was sure of the opposite and I had only hoped I might be passable. Also I found that I did resemble, to a surprising degree, Miss Number Two, and was, in my own masculine way, quite as attractive as she was, my hair the same matt-black, my eyes, mysterious, my cheeks with a mute, aristocratic pallor, my nose, stark. I had a thick, muscular neck not exactly in keeping with my fine-featured face and, as she held the mirror farther from me, I saw a barrel-chested manatee-thing, certainly ichthyoid, with little wing shapes lumping under my clothes at hips and shoulders as though I could actually, as I've dreamed, swim into the air, and I saw the eyes of Number Two leaning to get the same view as I had of myself. I could see her thought reflecting my own! What a curious shape, and is it beautiful or ugly? Has it a meaning of its own? Is it a symbol of sloth or courage or of sex? Or is it a symbol at all?

"I had thought," I said to her eye as it floated languidly at the edge of the mirror — I could scarcely tell mine from hers, three haughty eyes there, moving slightly eastward about a foot under the watery surface, I would guess. I decided to speak to all three. "I had

thought," I said, "that I might go on display." Two eyes remained immobile while the other contracted its lid a quarter of an inch. I could see I wasn't getting any sympathy from any of them.

One of them closed for a moment, as though, an eye could take a deep breath. Was it exasperated with me? Have you any concept *at* all, it seemed to be asking me, of what you really are? Does the fat lady, monstrous as she is, have anything to do with you? And the half-man, half-woman?

Ah, but *I* am certainly all male and perhaps nothing *but* male.

I see. Here, in other words, is the flying phallus at last, a truncated Hermes. Are you going on display for that? A little chicken Icarus (cut down, but winged, it is true) doing five o'clock drama in a different sort of back room?

But none of those eyes can know about that drama. They swim smugly in little back and forth motions, contracting their corners rhythmically in order to maintain their equilibrium. I see I have gone beyond the eyes. I'll tell them that fashions in freaks change; that, just as with sex, what was unacceptable last year is accepted this year. People always accept more as they become sophisticated, don't they? And isn't this equally desirable in freaks as in sex? Liberalise them, I say, and let me be one of those who struggle for this cause, this great opening-out of understanding, this acceptance without censure. The presentation will make such a difference, too. We'll do it with finesse and delicacy. To start, I will take the name Désiré. And certainly with my so unforeseen personal beauty ... I saw that the eyes thought not. The two, led by the one most energetic and most opinionated one, fell all over themselves trying to agree with each other. I could see they felt the mirror too small a place for any arguments.

Let me approach them, instead, from the point of view of love. I might ask them: Shouldn't people be taught to love? People don't realise, I will say, how hard it is to love and that it must be practiced daily with some difficult exercise. And *I* might provide that exercise.

But I'm sure I won't be that hard to love. Everyone loves a winner and I'll be the freak of freaks. They'll come to think of me as beautiful. The details of my body might even be, eventually, exposed on TV. My life story might be written, and surely, if I did have such a life, there would be something to write about, such as how I first decided to join the carnival and the difficulties I had, in the beginning, in doing so; how they all doubted that I would be accepted by the public, for I was, after all, a new concept in freaks. I had, it was felt, carried freakishness to its ultimate degree. I was wholly and utterly the freak, whereas people were used to half freaks. It was felt I might be too startling. I might upset people. They might be more than just disgusted, but shaken to their very bones. But, at last, in some small

circus sideshow, someone had had the courage to take me on. At first reactions were mixed. There were letters of protest: This was going too far ... an insult to the public ... poor taste that I should be where others could see me at all, let alone be on public view. I was even banned in a few cities, but of course this helped in the long run. Still, it was an uphill fight. Other freaks were jealous of my purity, my authenticity. No rubber, no makeup, no mutilation necessary. Yet I had my champions, including the circus owners who had invested in me and also some freaks who were generously able to appreciate someone who was far beyond them. Still it will have taken me, let us suppose, about ten years to achieve any real acceptance. In any field one must certainly count on at least this much time, and I am not asking for a quick and easy success. And so, by then, people would have become used to me. Some would say I had a fish-like beauty, some that my movements were graceful and well adapted to my shape and to my needs. Some would argue that my achievements in rolling and flopping about had taken at least as much practice and concentration as would be needed by a concert pianist. Films would then be made to preserve my movements for posterity. Perhaps I might have had my body, by this time, tattooed with flowers and the faces of pretty girls. I would go on TV. The book on my life would be written, and in it, also, would be a description of how I came to be married and how I manage in my household with a little electric cart steered with my teeth, my children, normal or almost normal (there is no need for my sort of mistake twice), and there would be something about my beautiful sister who helped me from the very beginning, at the first mention that I might be put on display.

"I had thought," I said, "that I might go on display. Yes, the carnival, the circus, no matter how small ... "

But the fisheye had already given its answer.

"I suppose," said Number Two, "that you would like me to see that a proper suit is made, the beginnings of tights and a brocade ... vest, shall we call it? Pink or blue? No, let's make it gold or silver with touches of red. I can sew it up myself out of silk and satin and, if you like, with little white wings to give the feeling of lightness to it all. Would you like them on the shoulder blades or buttocks?"

And she'll do it. I know she will and it will be better than I could possibly have conceived it myself, luminous as a peacock, gay as Santa Claus. I know Miss Number Two. Somehow, instinctively, she will touch the seed of my inner dream and make it grow into something greater than itself. Such work she will put into it! A month of hours. She'll hang it upon my wall and, with great joy, I'll dream of myself wearing it. I will grow old, leaning at my reading stand and dreaming, I know I will.

Then one day I will ask Mrs. Number One to put the suit on me. I will try (at least try, but she does have ways ... warm water and such) to withhold all else until she does, and then I'll know if it really fits or only seems to.

One of the odder words just now is hero, *which has virtually turned itself inside out. The* anti-hero *is not just a literary device but a sociological phenomenon. In fiction, the only really bouncy types seem to be the Conans and Elrics — the figures of 'heroic fantasy.' In real life, the 'activist' heroes are actually anti-villians — the violence kids, Hell's Angels, Stokely and Rap. (Or is Dr. Spock the anti-villain, breaking the law by stepping carefully over a police barrier under the eyes of hundreds of carefully motionless police?) Even the natural heroes of our age — the astronauts-in-armour on their flaming charges — are committed to a sit-still stay-in-place talk don't-act performance. Indeed, the closer we get to the actuality of space travel (and we are very close; the less the prospect seems to inflame the public imagination; instead not just popular, but even scientific, interest in UFO's and flying saucers has been considerably renewed in the past two years.*

Let them come to us: don't break security.

In the Egg
Günter Grass

Translated by Michael Hamburger

We live in the egg,
We have covered the inside wall
of the shell with dirty drawings
and the Christian names of our enemies.
We are being hatched.
Whoever is hatching us
is hatching our pencils as well.
Set free from the egg one day
at once we shall draw a picture
of whoever is hatching us.
We assume that we're being hatched
We imagine some good-natured fowl
and write school essays
about the colour and breed
of the hen that is hatching us.
When shall we break the shell?
Our prophets inside the egg
for a middling salary argue
about the period of incubation.
They posit a day called X.
Out of boredom and genuine need
we have invented incubators.
We are much concerned about our offspring inside the egg.
We should be glad to recommend our patent
to her who looks after us.
But we have a roof over our heads.
Senile chicks,
polyglot embryos
chatter all day
and even discuss their dreams.
And what if we're not being hatched?
If this shell will never break?
If our horizon is only that
of our scribbles, and always will be?
We hope that we're being hatched.

Even if we only talk of hatching
there remains the fear that someone
outside our shell will feel hungry
and crack us into the frying pan with a pinch of salt. —
What shall we do then, my brethren inside the egg?

01 15 24 P: *This is Friendship Seven. I'll try to describe what I'm in here. I am in a big mass of some very small particles that are brilliantly lit up like they're luminescent. I never saw anything like it. They round a little [sic]; they're coming by the capsule, and they look like stars. A whole shower of them coming by.*

01 15 57 P: *They swirl around the capsule and go in front of the window and they're all brilliantly lighted. They probably average may be seven or eight feet apart, but I can see them all down below me, also.*

01 16 06 CC: *Roger, Friendship Seven. Can you hear any impact with the capsule? Over.*

01 16 10 P: *Negative, negative. They're very slow; they're not going away from me more than maybe three or four miles per hour. They're going at the same speed I am approximately. They're only very slightly under my speed. Over.*

01 16 33 P: *They do, they do have a different motion, though, from me because they swirl around the capsule and then depart back the way I am looking.*

01 16 46 P: *Are you receiving? Over.*

01 16 55 P: *There are literally thousands of them.*

01 17 16 P: *This is Friendship Seven. Am I in contact with anyone? Over.*

(John Glenn, transcript of first orbital 'Mercury' flight, in The Coming of the Space Age.)

The Star-Pit
Samuel R. Delany

Two glass panes with dirt between and little tunnels from cell to cell: when I was a kid I had an ant-colony.

But once some of our four-to-six-year-olds built an ecologarium with six-foot plastic panels and grooved aluminium bar to hold corners and top down. They put it out on the sand.

There was a mud puddle against one wall so you could see what was going on under water. Sometimes segment worms crawling through the reddish earth hit the side so their tunnels were visible for a few inches. In hot weather the inside of the plastic got coated with mist and droplets. The small round leaves on the litmus vines changed from blue to pink, blue to pink as clouds coursed the sky and the pH of the photosensitive soil shifted slightly.

The kids would run out before dawn and belly down naked in the cool sand with their chins on the backs of their hands and stare in the half-dark till the red mill wheel of Sigma lifted over the bloody sea. The sand was maroon then, and the flowers of the crystal plants looked like rubies in the dim light of the giant sun. Up the beach the jungle would begin to whisper while somewhere an ani-wort would start warbling. The kids would giggle and poke each other and crowd closer.

Then Sigma-prime, the second member of the binary, would flare like thermite on the water, and crimson clouds would bleach from coral, through peach, to foam. The kids, half on top of each other, lay like a pile of copper ingots with sun streaks in their hair — even on little Antoni, my oldest, whose hair was black and curly like bubbling oil (like his mother's), the down on the small of his two-year-old back was a white haze across the copper if you looked that close to see.

More children came to squat and lean on their knees, or kneel with their noses an inch from the walls, to watch, like young magicians, as things were born, grew, matured, and other things were born. Enchanted at their own construction, they stared at the miracles in their live museum.

A small, red seed lay camouflaged in the silt by the lake/puddle. One evening as white Sigma-prime left the sky violet, it broke open into a brown larva as long and of the same colour as the first joint of Antoni's thumb. It flipped and swirled in the mud a couple of days, then crawled to the first branch of the nearest crystal plant to hang exhausted, head down from the tip. The brown flesh hardened,

thickened, grew black, shiny. Then one morning the children saw the onyx chrysalis crack, and by second dawn there was an emerald-eyed flying lizard buzzing at the plastic panels.

"Oh, look, da!" they called to me. "It's trying to get out!"

The speed-hazed creature butted at the corner for a few days, they settled at last to crawling around the broad leaves of the miniature shade palms.

When the season grew cool and there was the annual debate over whether the kids should put tunics on — they never stayed in them more than twenty minutes anyway — the jewels of the crystal plant misted, their facets coarsened, and they fell like gravel.

There were little four-cupped sloths, too, big as a six-year-old's fist. Most of the time they pressed their velvety bodies against the walls and stared longingly across the sand with their retractable eye-clusters. Then two of them swelled for about three weeks. We thought at first it was some bloating infection. But one evening there were a couple of litters of white, velvet balls hidden by the low leaves of the shade palms. The parents were occupied now and didn't pine to get out.

There was a rock half in and half out of the puddle, I remember, covered with what I'd always called mustard-moss when I saw it in the wild. Once it put out a brush of white hairs. And one afternoon the children ran to collect all the adults they could drag over. "Look, oh da, da, ma, look!" The hairs had detached themselves and were walking around the water's edge, turning end over end along the soft soil.

I had to leave for work in a few minutes and haul some spare drive parts out to Tau Ceti. But when I got back five days later, the hairs had taken root, thickened, and were already putting out the small round leaves of litmus vines. Among the new shoots, lying on her back, claws curled over her wrinkled belly, eyes cataracted like the foggy jewels of the crystal plant — she'd dropped her wings like cellophane days ago — was the flying lizard. Her pearl throat still pulsed, but as I watched, it stopped. Before she died, however, she managed to deposit, nearly camouflaged in the silt by the puddle, a scattering of red seeds.

I remember getting home from another job where I'd been doing the maintenance on the shuttle-boats for a crew putting up a ring station to circle a planet itself circling Aldebaran. I was gone a long time on that one. When I left the landing complex and wandered out toward the tall weeds at the edge of the beach, I still didn't see anybody.

Which was just as well because the night before I'd put on a real winner with the crew to celebrate the completion of the station. That

morning I'd taken a couple more drinks at the landing bar to undo last night's damage. Never works.

The swish of frond on frond was like clashing rasps. Sun on the sand reached out fingers of pure glare and tried to gouge my eyes. I was glad the home-compound was deserted because the kids would have asked questions I didn't want to answer; the adults wouldn't ask anything, which was even harder to answer.

Then, down by the ecologarium, a child screeched. And screeched again. Then Antoni came hurtling toward me, half running, half on all fours, and flung himself on my leg. "Oh, da! Da! Why, oh why, da?"

I'd kicked my boots off and shrugged my shirt back at the compound porch, but I still had my overalls on. Antoni had two fists full of my pants leg and wouldn't let go. "Hey, kid-boy, what's the matter?"

When I finally got him on my shoulder he butted his blubber wet face against my collarbone. "Oh, da! Da! It's crazy, it's all craaaa-zy!" His voice rose to lose itself in sobs.

"What's crazy, kid-boy? Tell da."

Antoni held my ear and cried while I walked down to the plastic enclosure.

They'd put a small door in one wall with a two-number combination lock that was supposed to keep this sort of thing from happening. I guess Antoni learned the combination from watching the older kids, or maybe he just figured it out.

One of the young sloths had climbed out and wandered across the sand about three feet.

"See, da! It crazy, it bit me. Bit me, da!" Sobs became sniffles as he showed me a puffy, bluish place on his wrist centred on which was a tiny crescent of pin-pricks. Then he pointed jerkily to the creature.

It was shivering, and bloody froth spluttered from its lip flaps. All the while it was digging futilely at the sand with its clumsy cups, eyes retracted. Now it fell over, kicked, tried to right itself, breath going like a flutter valve. "It can't take the heat," I explained, reaching down to pick it up.

It snapped back at me, and I jerked back. "Sun stroke, kid-boy. Yeah, it is crazy."

Suddenly it opened its mouth wide, let out all its air, and didn't take in any more. "It's all right now," I said.

Two more of the baby sloths were at the door, front cups over the sill, staring with bright, black eyes. I pushed them back with a piece of sea shell and closed the door. Antoni kept looking at the white fur ball on the sand. "Not crazy now?"

"It's dead," I told him.

"Dead because it went outside, da?"

I nodded.

"And crazy?" He made a fist and ground something already soft and wet around his upper lip.

I decided to change the subject, which was already too close to something I didn't like to think about. "Who's been taking care of you, anyway?" I asked. "You're a mess, kid-boy. Let's go and fix up that arm. They shouldn't leave a fellow your age all by himself." We started back to the compound. Those bites infect easily, and this one was swelling.

"Why it go crazy? Why it die when it go outside, da?"

"Can't take the light," I said as we reached the jungle. "They're animals that live in shadow most of the time. The plastic cuts out the ultraviolet rays, just like the leaves that shade them when they run loose in the jungle. Sigma-prime's high on ultraviolet. That's why you're so good looking, kid-boy. I think your ma told me their nervous systems are on the surface, all that fuzz. Under the ultraviolet, the enzymes break down so quickly that — does this mean anything to you at all?"

"Uh-uh" Antoni shook his head. Then he came out with, "Wouldn't it be nice, da — " he admired his bite while we walked " — if some of them could go outside, just a few?"

That stopped me. There were sun-spots on his blue black hair. Fronds reflected faint green on his brown cheek. He was grinning, little, and wonderful. Something that had been anger in me a lot of times momentarily melted to raging tenderness, whirling about him like the dust in the light striking down at my shoulders, raging to protect my son. "I don't know about that, kid-boy."

"Why not?"

"It might be pretty bad for the ones who had to stay inside," I told him. "I mean after a while."

"Why?"

I started walking again. "Come on, let's fix your arm and get you cleaned up."

I washed the wet stuff off his face, and scraped the dry stuff from beneath it which had been there at least two days. Then I got some antibiotic into him.

"You smell funny, da."

"Never mind how I smell. Let's go outside again." I put down a cup of black coffee too fast, and it and my hangover had a fight in my stomach. I tried to ignore it and do a little looking around. But I still couldn't find anybody. That got me mad. I mean he's independent, sure: he's mine. But he's only two.

Back on the beach we buried the dead sloth in sand; then I pointed out the new-glittering stalks of the tiny crystal plants. At the

bottom of the ponds, in the jellied mass, of ani-wort eggs, you could see the tadpole forms quivering already. An orange-fringed shelf fungus had sprouted nearly eight inches since it had been just a few black spores on a pile of dead leaves two weeks back.

"Grow up," Antoni chirped with nose and fists against the plastic. "Everything grow up, and up."

"That's right."

He grinned at me. "I grow!"

"You sure as hell do."

"You grow?" Then he shook his head, twice: once to say no, and the second time because he got a kick from shaking his hair around — there was a lot of it. "You don't grow. You don't get any bigger. Why don't you grow?"

"I do too," I said indignantly. "Just very slowly."

Antoni turned around, leaned on the plastic and moved one toe at a time in the sand — I can't do that — watching me.

"You have to grow all the time," I said. "Not necessarily get bigger. But inside your head you have to grow, kid-boy. For us human-type people that's what's important And that kind of growing never stops. At least it shouldn't. You can grow, kid boy, or you can die. That's the choice you've got, and it goes on all your life."

He looked back over his shoulder. "Grow up, all the time, even if they can't get out."

"Yeah," I said. And was uncomfortable all over again. I started pulling off my overalls for something to do. "Even — " The zipper got stuck. "God *damn* it! — if you can't get out." *Rnrnrnrnrnrn* — it came loose.

The rest got back that evening. They'd been on a group trip around the foot of the mountain. I did a little shouting to make sure my point got across about leaving Antoni alone. Didn't do much good. You know how family arguments go: He didn't want to come. We weren't going to force — So what. He's got to learn to do things he doesn't want —

Like some other people I could mention!

Now look —

It's a healthy group. Don't you want him to grow up healthy —

I'll be happy if he just grows up period. No food, no medical —

But the server was chock full of food. He knows how to use it.

Look, when I got home the kid's arms was swollen all the way up to his elbow!

And so on and so forth, with Antoni sitting in the middle, looking confused. When he got confused enough, he ended it all by announcing matter-of-factly: "Da smell funny when he came home."

Every one got quiet. Then someone said, "Oh, Vyme, you didn't

come home that way again! I mean, in front of the children."

I said a couple of things I was sorry for later and stalked off down the beach — on a four-mile hike.

Times I got home from work? The ecologarium? I guess I'm just leading up to this one.

The particular job had taken me a hectic week to get. It was putting back together a battleship that was gutted somewhere off Aurigae. Only when I got there, I found I'd been already laid off. That particular war was over — they're real quick now. So I scraped and lied and browned my way into a repair gang that was serving a travelling replacement station, generally had to humiliate myself to get the job because every other drive mechanic from the battleship fiasco was after it too. Then I got canned the first day because I came to work smelling funny. It took me another week to hitch a ride back to Sigma. Didn't even have enough to pay passage, but I made a deal with the pilot I'd do half the driving for him.

We were an hour out, and I was at the controls when something I'd never heard of happening, happened. We came *this* close to ramming another ship. Consider how much empty space there is; the chances are infinitesimal. And on top of that every ship should be broadcasting an identification beam at all times.

But this big, bulbous keeler-inter-galactic slid by so close I could *see* her through the front viewport. Our inertia system went nuts. We jerked around in the stasis whirl from the keeler. I slammed on the video-intercom and shouted, "You great big stupid ... *stupid* ... " so mad and scared I couldn't say anything else.

The golden piloting the ship stared at me from the viewscreen with mildly surprised annoyance. I remember his face was just slightly more negroid than mine.

Our little Serpentina couldn't hurt him. But had we been even a hundred meters closer we might have ionised. The other pilot came bellowing from behind the sleeper curtain and started cursing me out.

"Damn it," I shouted, "it was one of those ... " and lost all the profanity I know to my rage, " ... golden ... "

"This far into galactic centre? Come off It. They should be hanging out around the star-pit!"

"It was a keeler drive," I insisted. "It came right in front of us." I stopped because the control stick was shaking in my hand. You know the Serpentina colophon? They have it in the corner of the view screen and raised in plastic on the head of the control knobs on the ship. Well, it got pressed into the ham of my thumb so you could make it out for an hour. I was squeezing that control rod that tight.

When he set me down, I went straight to the bar to cool off. And got in a fight. When I reached the beach. I was broke, I had a bloody

nose, I was sick, and furious.

It was just after first sunset, and the kids were squealing around the ecologarium. Then one little girl I didn't even recognise ran up to me and jerked my arm. "Da, oh, da! Come look! The ani-worts are just about to — "

I pushed her, and she sat down, surprised, on the sand.

I just wanted to get to the water and splash something cold on my face, because every minute or so it would start to burn.

Another bunch of kids grabbed me, shouting, "Da, da, the ani-worts, da!" and tried to pull me over.

First I took two steps with them. Then I just swung my arms out. I didn't make a sound. But I put my head down and barreled against the plastic wall. Kids screamed. Aluminium snapped, the plastic cracked and went down. My boots were still on, and I kicked and kicked at red earth and sand. Shade palms went down and the leaves tore under my feet. Crystal plants broke like glass rods beneath a piece of plastic. A swarm of lizards buzzed up around my head. Some of the red was Sigma, some was what burned behind my face.

I remember I was still shaking and watching water run out of the broken lake over the sand, then soak in so that the wet tongue of sand expanded a little, raised just a trifle around the edge. Then I looked up to see the kids coming back down the beach, crying, shouting, afraid and clustered around Antoni's ma. She walked steadily toward me — steady because she was a woman and they were children. But I saw the same fear in her face. Antoni was on her shoulder. Other grownups were coming behind her.

Antoni's ma was a biologist, and I think she had suggested the ecologarium to the kids in the first place. When she looked up from the ruin I'd made, I knew I'd broken something of hers too.

An odd expression got caught in the features of her — I remember it oh so beautiful — face, with compassion alongside the anger, contempt alongside the fear. "Oh, for pity's sake, Vyme," she cried, not loudly at all. "Won't you ever grow up?"

I opened my mouth, but everything I wanted to say was too big and stayed wedged in my throat.

"Grow up?" Antoni repeated and reached for a lizard that buzzed his head. "Everything stop growing up, now." He looked down again at the wreck I'd made. "All broken. Everything get out."

"He didn't mean to break it," she said to the others for me, then knifed my gratitude with a look. "We'll put it back together."

She put Antoni on the sand and picked up one of the walls.

After they got started, they let me help. A lot of the plants were broken. And only the ani-worts who'd completed metamorphosis could be saved. The flying lizards were too curious to get far away, so we —

they netted them and got them back inside. I guess I didn't help that much. And I wouldn't say I was sorry.

They got just about everything back except the sloths.

We couldn't find them. We searched a long time, too.

The sun was down so they should have been all right. They can't negotiate the sand with any speed so couldn't have reached the jungle. But there were no tracks, no nothing. We even dug in the sand to see if they'd buried themselves. It wasn't till more than a dozen years later I discovered where they went.

For the present I accepted Antoni's mildly adequate, "They just must of got out again."

Not too long after that I left the procreation group. Went off to work one day, didn't come back. But like I said to Antoni, you either grow or die. I didn't die.

Once I considered returning. But there was another war, and suddenly there wasn't anything to return to. Some of the group got out alive. Antoni and his ma didn't. I mean there wasn't even any water left on the planet.

When I finally came to the Star-pit, myself, I hadn't had a drink in years. But working there out on the galaxy's edge did something to me — something to the part that grows I'd once talked about on the beach with Antoni.

If it did it to me, it's not surprising it did it to Ratlit and the rest.

(And I remember a black-eyed creature pressed against the plastic wall, staring across impassable sands.)

Perhaps it was knowing this was as far as you could go.

Perhaps it was the golden.

Golden? I hadn't even joined the group yet when I first heard the word. I was sixteen and a sophomore at Luna Vocational. I was born in a city called New York on a planet called Earth. Luna is its one satellite. You've heard of the system, I'm sure; that's where we all came from. A few other things about it are well known. Unless you're an anthropologist, though, I doubt you've ever been there. It's way the hell off the main trading routes and pretty primitive. I was a drive-mechanics major, on scholarship, living in and studying hard. All morning in Practical Theory (a ridiculous name for a ridiculous class, I thought then) we'd spent putting together a model keeler-intergalactic drive. Throughout those dozens of helical inserts and superinertia organus sensitives, I had been silently cursing my teacher, thinking, about like everyone else in the class, "So what if they can fly this jalopy from one galaxy to another. Nobody will ever be able to ride in them. Not with the Psychic and Physiologic shells hanging around this cluster of the Universe."

Back in the dormitory I was lying on my bed, scraping graphite

lubricant from my nails with the end of my slide rule and half reading at a folded-back copy of *The Young Mechanica* when I saw the article and the pictures.

Through some freakish accident, two people had been discovered who didn't crack up at twenty thousand light-years off the galactic rim, who didn't die at twenty-five thousand.

They were both psychological freaks with some incredible hormone imbalance in their systems. One was a little Oriental girl; the other was an older man, blond and big boned, from a cold planet circling Cygnus-beta: golden. They looked sullen as hell, both of them.

Then there were more articles, more pictures, in the economic journals, the sociology student-letters, the legal bulletins, as various fields began acknowledging the impact that the golden and the sudden birth of intergalactic trade were having on them. The head of some commission summed it up with the statement: "Though interstellar travel has been with us for three centuries, intergalactic trade has been an impossibility, not because of mechanical limitations, but rather because of barriers that till now we have not even been able to define. Some psychic shock causes insanity in any human — or for that matter, any intelligent species or perceptual machine or computer — that goes more than twenty thousand light-years from the galactic rim; then complete physiological death, as well as recording breakdown in computers that might replace human crews. Complex explanations have been offered, none completely satisfactory, but the base of the problem seems to be this: as the nature of space and time are relative to the concentration of matter in a given area of the continuum, the nature of reality itself operates by the same, or similar laws. The averaged mass of all the stars in our galaxy controls the 'reality' of our microsector of the universe. But as a ship leaves the galactic rim, 'reality' breaks down and causes insanity and eventual death for any crew, even though certain mechanical laws — though not all — appear to remain, for reasons we don't understand, relatively constant. Save for a few barbaric experiments done with psychedelics at the dawn of spatial travel, we have not even developed a vocabulary that can deal with 'reality' apart from its measurable, physical expression. Yet, just when we had to face the black limit of intergalactic space, bright resources glittered within. Some few of us whose sense of reality has been shattered by infantile, childhood, or prenatal trauma, whose physiological and psychological orientation makes life in our interstellar society painful or impossible — not all, but a few of these golden ... " at which point there was static, or the gentleman coughed, " ... can make the crossing and return."

The name golden, sans noun, stuck.

Few was the understatement of the millennium. Slightly less than one human being in thirty-four thousand is a golden. A couple of people had pictures of emptying all mental institutions by just shaking them out over the galactic rim. Didn't work like that. The particular psychosis and endocrine setup was remarkably specialised. Still, back then there was excitement, wonder, anticipation, hope, admiration in the word: admiration for the ones who could get out.

"Golden?" Ratlit said when I asked him. He was working as a grease monkey out here in the Star-pit over at Poloscki's. "Born with the word. Grew up with it. Weren't no first time for me. Though I remember when I was about six, right after the last of my parents had been killed, and I was hiding out with a bunch of other lice in a broken-open packing crate in an abandoned freight yard near the ruins of Helios on Creton VII — that's where I was born, I think. Most of the city had been starved out by then, but somebody was getting food to us. There was this old crook-back character who was hiding too. He used to sit on the top of the packing crate and bang his heels on the aluminium slats and tell us stories about the stars. Had a couple of rags held with twists of wire for clothes, missing two fingers off one hand; he kept plucking the loose skin under his chin with those grimy talons. And he talked about them. So I asked, 'Golden what, sir?' He leaned forward so that his face was like a mahogany bruise on the evening, and croaked, 'They've been *out,* I tell you, seen more than even you or I. Human and inhuman, kid-boy, mothered by women and fathered by men, still they live by their own laws and walk their own ways!' " Ratlit and I were sitting under a street lamp with our feet over the Edge where the fence had broken. His hair was like breathing flame in the wind, his single earring glittered. Star-flecked infinity dropped away below our boot soles, and the wind created by the stasis field that held our atmosphere down — we call it the 'world-wind' out here because it's never cold and never hot and like nothing on any world — whipped his black shirt back from his bony chest as we gazed on galactic night between our knees. "I guess that was back during the second Kyber war," he concluded.

"Kyber war?" I asked. "Which one was that?"

He shrugged. "I just know it was fought over possession of couple of tons of di-allium, that's the polarised element the golden brought back from Lupe-galaxy. They used y-adna ships to fight it — that's why it was such a bad war. I mean worse than usual."

"Y-adna? That's a drive I don't know anything about."

"Some golden saw the plans for them in a civilisation in Magellanic-9."

"Oh," I said. "And what was Kyber?"

"It was a weapon, a sort of fungus the golden brought back from

some overrun planet on the rim of Andromeda. It's deadly. Only they were too stupid to bring back the antitoxin."

"That's golden for you."

"Yeah. You ever notice about golden, Vyme? I mean just the word. I found out all about it from my publisher, once. It's semantically unsettling."

"Really?" I said. "So are they. Unsettling I mean."

I'd just finished a rough, rough day installing a rebuilt keeler in a quantum transport hull that just wasn't big enough. The golden having the job done stood over my shoulder the whole time, and every hour he'd come out with the sort of added instruction that would make the next sixty-one minutes miserable. But I did it. The golden paid me in cash and without a word climbed into the lift, and two minutes later, while I was still washing the grease off, the damn five-hundred-ton hulk began to whistle for take-off. Sandy, a young fellow who'd come looking for a temporary mechanic's job three months back, but hadn't given me cause to fire him yet, barely had time to pull the big waldoes out of the way and go scooting into the shock chamber when the three-hundred meter doofus tore loose from the grapplers. And Sandy, who, like a lot of these youngsters drifting around from job to job, is usually sort of quiet and vague, got loud and specific, " ... two thousand pounds of non-shock proof equipment out there ... ruin it all if he could ... I'm not expendable, I don't care what a ... these golden out here ... " while the ship hove off where only the golden go. I just flipped on the 'not-open' sign, left the rest of the grease where it was, left the hangar and hunted up Ratlit.

So there we were, under that street lamp, sitting on the Edge, in the world-wind.

"Golden," Ratlit said under the roar. "It would be much easier to take if it were grammatically connected to something: golden ones, golden people. Or even one gold, two golden."

"Male golden, female goldine?"

"Something like that. It's not an adjective, it's not a noun. My publisher told me that for a while it was written with a dash after it that stood for whatever it might modify."

I remembered the dash. It was an uneasy joke, a fill-in for that cough. Golden *what?* People had already started to feel uncomfortable. Then it went past joking and back to just 'golden'.

"Think about that, Vyme. Just golden: one, two, or three of them."

"That's something to think about, kid-boy," I said.

Ratlit had been six during the Kyber war. Square that and add it once again for my age now. Ratlit's? Double six and add one. I like kids, and they like me. But that may be because my childhood left me a lot younger at forty-two than I should be. Ratlit's had left him a lot

older than any thirteen-year-old has a right to be.

"No golden took part in the war," Ratlit said.

"They never do." I watched his thin fingers get all tangled together.

After two divorces, my mother ran off with a salesman and left me and four siblings with an alcoholic aunt for a year. Yeah, they still have divorces, monogamous marriages and stuff like that where I was born. Like I say, it's pretty primitive. I left home at fifteen, made it through vocational school on my own, and learned enough about what makes things fly to end up — after that disastrous marriage I told you about earlier — with my own repair hangar on the Star-pit.

Compared with Ratlit I had a stable childhood.

That's right, he lost the last parent he remembered when he was six. At seven he was convicted of his first felony — after escaping from Creton VII. But part of his treatment at hospital *cum* reform school *cum* prison was to have the details lifted from his memory. "Did something to my head back there. That's why I never could learn to read, I think." For the next couple of years he ran away from one foster group after the other. When he was eleven, some guy took him home from Play Planet where he'd been existing under the boardwalk on discarded hot dogs, souvlaki, and felafel. "Fat, smoked perfumed cigarettes; name was Vivian?" Turned out to be the publisher. Ratlit stayed for three months during which time he dictated a novel to Vivian. "Protecting my honour," Rablit explained. "I had to do *something* to keep him busy."

The book sold a few hundred thousand copies as a precocious curiosity among many. But Ratlit had split. The next years he was involved as a shill in some illegality I never understood. He didn't either. "But I bet I made a million, Vyme! I earned at least a million." It's possible. At thirteen he still couldn't read nor write, but his travels had gained him fair fluency in three languages. A couple of weeks ago he'd wandered off a stellar tram dirty and broke, here at the Star-pit. And I'd gotten him a job as grease monkey over at Poloscki's.

He leaned his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hands. "Vyme, it's a shame."

"What's a shame, kid-boy?"

"To be washed up at my age. A has-been! To have to grapple with the fact that this — " he spat at a star — "is it."

He was talking about golden again.

"You still have a chance," I shrugged. "Most of the time it doesn't come out till puberty."

He cocked his head up at me. "I've been pubescent since I was nine, buster."

"*Excuse* me."

"I feel cramped in, Vyme. There's all that night out there to grow up in, to explore."

"There was a time," I mused, "when the whole species was confined to the surface, give or take a few feet up or down, of a single planet. You've got a whole galaxy to run around in. You've seen a lot of it, yeah. But not all."

"But there are billions of galaxies out there. I want to see them. In all the stars around here there hasn't been one life form discovered that's based on anything but silicon or carbon. I overheard two golden in a bar once, talking: there's something in some galaxy out there that's as big as a star, neither alive nor dead, and sings. I want to hear it, Vyme!"

"Ratlit, you can't fight reality."

"Oh, go to sleep, grandpa!" He closed his eyes and bent his head back until the cords of his neck quivered. "What is it that makes a golden? A combination of physiological and psychological ... what?"

"It's primarily some sort of hormonal imbalance as well as an environmentally conditioned thalamic/personality response."

"Yeah. Yeah." His head came down. "And that X-chromosome heredity nonsense they just connected up with it a few years back. But all I know is *they* can take the stasis shift from galaxy to galaxy, where you and I, Vyme, if we get more than twenty thousand light-years off the rim, we're dead."

"Insane at twenty thousand," I corrected. "Dead at twenty-five."

"Same difference." He opened his eyes. They were large, green and mostly pupil. "You know, I stole a golden belt? Rolled it off a staggering slob about a week ago who came out of a bar and collapsed on the corner. I went across the Pit to Calle-J where nobody knows me and wore it around for a few hours, just to see if I felt different."

"You did?" Ratlit had lengths of gut that astounded me about once a day.

"I didn't. But people walking around me did. Wearing that two-inch band of yellow metal around my waist, nobody in the worlds could tell I wasn't a golden, just walking by on the street, without talking to me a while, or making hormone tests. And wearing that belt, I learned just how much I hated golden. Because I could suddenly see, in almost everybody who came by, how much they hated me while I had that metal belt on. I threw it over the Edge." Suddenly he grinned. "But maybe I'll steal another one."

"You really hate them, Ratlit?"

He narrowed his eyes at me and looked superior.

"Sure, I talk about them," I told him. "Sometimes they're a pain to work for. But it's not their fault we can't take the reality shift."

"I'm just a child," he said evenly, "incapable of such fine

reasoning. *I* hate them." He looked back at the night. "How can you stand to be trapped by anything, Vyme?"

Three memories crowded into my head when he said that.

First: I was standing at the railing of the East River — runs past this New York I was telling you about — at midnight, looking at the illuminated dragon of the Manhattan Bridge that spanned the water, then at the industrial fires flickering in bright, smoky Brooklyn, and then at the template of mercury street lamps behind me bleaching out the playground and most of Houston Street; then, at the reflections in the water, here like crinkled foil, there like glistening rubber; at last, looked up at the midnight sky itself. It wasn't black but dead pink, without a star. This glittering world made the sky a roof that pressed down on me so I almost screamed ... That time the next night I was twenty-seven light-years away from Sol on my first star-run.

Second: I was visiting my mother after my first few years out. I was looking in the closet for something when this contraption of plastic straps and buckles fell on my head. "What's this, ma?" And she smiled with a look of idiot nostalgia and crooned, "Why that's your little harness, Vymey. Your first father and I would take you on picnics up at Bear Mountain and put you in that and tie you to a tree with about ten feet of cord so you wouldn't get — " I didn't hear the rest because of the horror that suddenly flooded me, thinking of myself tied up in that thing. Okay, I was twenty and had just joined that beautiful procreation-group a year back on Sigma and was the proud father of three and expecting two more. The hundred and sixty-three of us had the whole beach and nine miles of jungle and half a mountain to ourselves; maybe I was seeing Antoni caught up in that thing, trying to catch a bird or a beetle or a wave — with only ten feet of cord. I hadn't worn clothes for anything but work in a twelvemonth, and I was chomping to get away from that incredible place I had grown up in called an apartment and back to wives, husbands, kids and civilisation. Anyway, it was pretty terrible.

The third? After I had left the proke-group — fled them, I suppose, guilty and embarrassed over something I couldn't name, still having nightmares once a month that woke me screaming about what was going to happen to the kids, even though I knew one point of group marriage was to prevent the loss of one, two, or three parents being traumatic — still wondering if I wasn't making the same mistakes my parents made, hoping my brood wouldn't turn out like me, or worse like the kids you sometimes read about in the paper (like Ratlit, though I hadn't met him yet), horribly suspicious that no matter how different I tried to be from my sires, it was just the same thing all over again ... Anyway, I was on the ship bringing me to the Star-pit for the first time. I'd gotten talking to a golden who, as golden go, was

a pretty regular gal. We'd been discussing inter-and intragalactic drives. She was impressed I knew so much. I was impressed that she could use them and know so little. She was digging in a very girl-way the six-foot-four, two-hundred-and-ten-pound drive mechanic with mildly grimy fingernails that was me. I was digging in a very boy-way the slim, amber-eyed young lady who had seen it *all*. From the view deck we watched the immense artificial disk of the Star-pit approach, when she turned to me and said, in a voice that didn't sound cruel at all, "This is as far as you go, isn't it?" And I was frightened all over again, because I knew that on about nine different levels she was right.

Ratlit said: "I know what you're thinking." A couple of times when he'd felt like being quiet and I'd felt like talking I may have told him more than I should. "Well, cube that for me, dad. That's how trapped I feel!"

I laughed, and Ratlit looked very young again. "Come on," I said. "Let's take a walk."

"Yeah." He stood. The wind fingered at our hair. "I want to go see Alegra."

"I'll walk you as far as Calle-G," I told him. "Then I'm going to go to bed."

"I wonder what Alegra thinks about this business? I always find Alegra a very good person to talk to," he said sagely. "Not to put you down, but her experiences are a little more up to date than yours. You have to admit she has a modern point of view. Plus the fact that she's older." Than him, anyway. She was fifteen.

"I don't think being 'trapped' ever really bothers her," I said. "Which may be a place to take a lesson from."

By Ratlit's standards Alegra had a few things over me. In my youth kids took to dope in their teens, twenties. Alegra was born with a three-hundred-milligram-a-day habit on a bizarre narcotic that combined the psychedelic qualities of the most powerful hallucinogens with the addictiveness of the strongest depressants. I can sympathise. Alegra's mother was addicted, and the tolerance was passed with the blood plasma through the placental wall. Ordinarily a couple of complete transfusions at birth would have gotten the new-born child straight. But Alegra was also a highly projective telepath. She projected the horrors of birth, the glories of her infantile hallucinated world on befuddled doctors; she was given her drug. Without too much difficulty she managed to be given her drug every day since.

Once I asked Alegra when she'd first heard of golden, and she came back with this horror story. A lot were coming back from Tiber-44 cluster with psychic shock — the mental condition of golden is pretty delicate, and sometimes very minor conflicts nearly ruin

them. Anyway, the government that was sponsoring the importation of micro-micro surgical equipment from some tiny planet in that galaxy, to protect its interests, hired Alegra, age eight, as a psychiatric therapist. "I'd concretise their fantasies and make them work 'em through. In just a couple of hours I'd have 'em back to their old, mean, stupid selves again. Some of them were pretty nice when they came to me." But there was a lot of work for her; projective telepaths are rare. So they started withholding her drug to force her to work harder, then rewarding her with increased dosage. "Up till then," she told me, "I might have kicked it. But when I came away, they had me on double what I used to take. They pushed me past the point where withdrawal would be fatal. But I *could* have kicked it, up till then, Vyme." That's right. Age eight.

Oh yeah. The drug was imported by golden from Cancer-9, and most of it goes through the Star-pit. Alegra came here because illegal imports are easier to come by, and you can get it for just about nothing — if you want it. Golden don't use it.

The wind lessened as Ratlit and I started back. Ratlit began to whistle. In Calle-K the first night lamp had broken so that the level street was a tunnel of black.

"Ratlit?" I asked. "Where do you think you'll be, oh, in say five years?"

"Quiet," he said. I'm trying to get to the end of the street without bumping into the walls, tripping on something, or some other catastrophe. If we get through the next five minutes all right, I'll worry about the next five years." He began whistling again.

"Trip? Bump the walls?"

"I'm listening for echoes." Again he commenced the little jets of music.

I put my hands in my overall pouch and went on quietly while Ratlit did the bat bit. Then there was a catastrophe. Though I didn't realise it at the time.

Into the circle of light from the remaining lamp at the other end of the street walked a golden.

His hands went up to his face, and he was laughing. The sound skittered in the street. His belt was low on his belly the way the really down and broke g ...

I just thought of a better way to describe him; the resemblance struck me immediately. He looked like Sandy, my mechanic, who is short, twenty-four years old, muscled like an ape, and wears his worn-out work clothes even when he's off duty. ("I just want this job for a while, boss. I'm not starring out here at the Star-pit. As soon as I save up a little, I'm gonna make it back in toward galactic centre. It's funny out here, like dead." He gazes up through the opening in the hangar

roof where there are no clouds and no stars either. "Yeah. I'm just gonna be here for a little while."

("Fine with me, kid-boy."

(That was three months back, like I say. He's still with me. He works hard too, which puts him a cut above a lot of characters out here. There's something about Sandy ...) On the other hand Sandy's face is also hacked up with acne. His hair is always nap short over his wide head, but in these aspects, the golden was exactly Sandy's opposite, come to think of it. There was still something about him ...

The golden staggered, went down on his knees still laughing, then collapsed. By the time we reached him, he was silent. With the toe of his boot Ratlit nudged the hand from the belt buckle.

It flopped, palm up, on the pavement. The little fingernail was three quarters of an inch long, the way a lot of the golden wear it. (Like his face, the tips of Sandy's fingers are, all masticated wrecks. Still, something ...) "Now isn't that something." Ratlit shook his head. "What do you want to do with him, Vyme?"

"Nothing," I said. "Let him sleep it off."

"Leave him so somebody can come along and steal his belt?" Ratlit grinned. "I'm not that nasty."

"Weren't you just telling me how much you hated golden?"

"I'd be nasty to whoever stole the belt and wore it. Nobody but a golden should be hated that much."

"Ratlit, let's go."

But he had already kneeled down and was shaking his shoulder. "Let's get him to Alegra's and find out what's the matter with him."

"He's just drunk."

"Nope," Ratlit said. "Cause he don't smell funny."

"Look. Get back." I hoisted the golden up and laid him across my neck, fireman's carry. "Start moving," I told Ratlit. "I think you're crazy."

Ratlit grinned. "Thanks. Maybe he'll be grateful and lay some lepta on me for taking him in off the street."

"You don't know golden," I said. "But if he does, split it with me."

"Sure."

Two blocks later we reached Alegra's place. But like I say, Sandy, though well built, is little, so I didn't have much trouble. Halfway up the tilting stairs Ratlit said, "She's in a good mood."

"I guess she is." The weight across my shoulders was becoming pleasant.

I can't describe Alegra's place. I can describe a lot of places like it; and I can describe it before she moved in because I knew a derelict named Drunk-roach who slept on that floor before she did. You know what never-wear plastics look like when they wear out? What non-rust

metals look like when they rust through? It was a shabby crack-walled cubicle with dirt in the corners and scars on the window pane when Drunk-roach had his pile of blankets in the corner. But since the hallucinating protective telepath took it over, who knows what it had become.

Ratlit opened the door on an explosion of classical beauty. "Come in," she sang, accompanied by symphonic arrangement scored on twenty-four staves, with full chorus. "What's that you're carrying, Vyme? Oh, it's a golden!" And before me, dizzying tides of yellow.

"Put him down, put him down quick and let's see what's wrong!" Hundreds of eyes, spotlights, glittering lenses; I lowered him to the mattress in the corner. "Ohhh ... " breathed Alegra.

And the golden lay on orange silk pillows in a teak barge drawn by swans, accompanied by flutes and drums.

"Where did you find him?" she hissed, circling against the ivory moon on her broom. We watched the glowing barge, hundreds of feet below, sliding down the silvered waters between the crags.

"We just picked him up off the street," Ratlit said. "Vyme thought he was drunk. But he don't smell."

"Was he laughing?" Alegra asked. Laughter rolled and broke on the rocks.

"Yeah," Ratlit said. "Just before he collapsed"

"Then he must be from the Un-dok expedition that just got back." Mosquitoes darted at us through wet fronds. The insects reeled among the leaves, upsetting droplets that fell like glass as, barely visible beyond the palms, the barge drifted on the bright, sweltering river.

"That's right," I said, back-paddling frantically to avoid a hippopotamus that threatened to upset my kayak. "I'd forgotten they'd just come in."

"Okay," Ratlit said, his breath clouding his lips. "I'm out of it. Let me in. Where did they come back from?" The snow hissed beneath the runners, as we looked after the barge, nearly at the white horizon.

"Un-dok, of course," Alegra said. The barking grew fainter. "Where did you think?"

White eclipsed to black, and the barge was a spot gleaming in galactic night, flown on by labouring comets.

"Un-dok is the furthest galaxy reached yet," I told Ratlit. "They just got back last week."

"Sick," Alegra added.

I dug my fingers against my abdomen to grab the pain.

"They all came back sick — "

Fever heated blood-bubbles in my eyes: I slipped to the ground, my mouth wide, my tongue like paper on my lips ...

Ratlit coughed. "All *right,* Alegra, Cut it out! You don't have to be

so dramatic!"

"Oh, I'm dreadfully sorry Ratty, Vyme." Coolth, water. Nausea swept away as solicitous nurses hastily put the pieces back together until everything was beautiful, or so austerely horrible it could be appreciated as beauty. "Anyway," she went on, "they came back with some sort of disease they picked up out there. Apparently it's not contagious, but they're stuck with it for the rest of their lives. Every few days they suddenly have a blackout. It's preceded by a fit of hysterics. It's just one of those stupid things they can't do anything about yet. It doesn't hurt their being golden."

Ratlit began to laugh. Suddenly he asked, "How long are they passed out for?"

"Only a few hours," Alegra said. "It must be terribly annoying."

And I began to feel mildly itchy in all sorts of unscratchable places, my shoulder blades, somewhere down my ear, the roof of my mouth. Have you ever tried to scratch the roof of your mouth?

"Well," Ratlit said, "let's sit down and wait it out."

"We can talk," Alegra said, patly. "That way it won't seem like such a long ... " and hundreds of years later she finished " ... time."

"Good," Ratlit said. "I wanted to talk to you. That's why I came up here in the first place."

"Oh, fine!" Alegra said. "I love to talk. I want to talk about love. Loving someone" (an incredible yearning twisted my stomach, rose to block my throat) "I mean, really loving someone" (the yearning brushed the edge of agony) "means you are willing to admit the person you love is not what you first fell in love with, not the image you first had; and you must be able to like them still for being as close to that image as they are, and avoid disliking them for being so far away."

And through the tenderness that suddenly obliterated all hurt, Ratlit's voice came from the jeweled mosaics shielding him: "Alegra, I want to talk about loneliness."

"I'm on my way home, kids," I said. "Tell me what happens with Prince Charming when he wakes up." They kept on talking while I went through the difficulties of finding my way out without Alegra's help. When my head cleared, halfway down the stairs, I couldn't tell you if I'd been there five minutes or five years.

When I got to the hangar next morning Sandy was filing the eight-foot prongs on the conveyer. "You got a job coming in about twenty minutes," he called down from the scaffold.

"I hope it's not another of those rebuilt jobs."

"Yep."

"Hell," I said. "I don't want to see another one for six weeks."

"All he wants is a general tune-up. Maybe two hours."

"Depends on where it's been," I said. "Where has it been?"

"Just back from — "

"Never mind." I started toward the office cubicle. "I think I'll put the books in order for the last six months. Can't let it go forever."

"Boss!" Sandy protested, "That'll take all day!"

"Then I better get started." I leaned back out the door. "Don't disturb me."

Of course as soon as the shadow of the hull fell over the office window I came out in my coveralls, after giving Sandy five minutes to get it grappled and himself worried. I took the lift up to the one-fifty catwalk. When I stepped out, Sandy threw me a grateful smile from his scar-ugly face. The golden had already started his instructions. When I reached them and coughed, the golden turned to me and continued talking, not bothering to fill me in on what he had said before, figuring Sandy and I would put it together. You could tell this golden had made his pile. He wore an immaculate blue tunic, with bronze codpiece, bracelets and earrings. His hair was the same bronze, his skin was burned red black, and his blue-gray eyes and tight-muscled mouth were proud, proud, proud. While I finished getting instructions, Sandy quietly got started un-welding the eight-foot seal of the organum so we could get to the checkout circuits.

Finally the golden stopped talking — that's the only way you could tell he was finished — and leaned his angular six and a half feet against the railing, clicking his glossy, manicured nails against the pipe a few times. He had that same sword-length pinky nail, all white against his skin. I climbed out on the rigging to help Sandy.

We had been at work ten minutes when a kid, maybe eighteen or nineteen, barefoot and brown, black hair hacked off shoulder length, a rag that didn't fit tucked around under his belt, and dirty, came wandering down the catwalk. His thumbs were hooked under the metal links: golden.

First I thought he'd come from the ship. Then I realised he'd just stalked into the hangar from outside and come up on the lift.

"Hey, brother!" The kid who was golden hooked his thumbs in his belt, as Sandy and I watched the dialogue from the rigging on the side of the hull. "I'm getting tired of hanging around this Star-pit. Just about broke as well. Where you running to?"

The man who was golden clicked his nails again. "Go away, distant cousin."

"Come on, brother, give me a berth on your lifeboat out of this dungheap to someplace worthwhile."

"Go away, or I'll kill you."

"Now, brother, I'm just a youngster adrift in this forsaken quarter of the sky. Come on, now — "

Suddenly the blond man whirled from the railing, grabbed up a four-foot length of pipe leaning beside him, and swung it so hard it hissed. The black-haired ragamuffin leapt back and from under his rag snatched something black that, with a flick of that long nail, suddenly grew seven inches of blade. The bar swung again, caught the shoulder of the boy, then clattered against the hull. He shrieked and came straight forward. The two bodies locked, turned, fell. A gurgle, and the man's hands slipped from the neck of the ragamuffin. The boy scrambled back to his feet. Blood bubbled and popped on the hot blade.

A last spasm caught the man, and he flipped over, smearing the enameled catwalk, rolled once more, this time under the rail, and dropped two hundred and fifty feet to the cement flooring.

Flick. Off went the power in the knife. The golden wiped powdered blood on his thigh, spat over the rail and said softly, "No relative of mine." Flick. The blade itself disappeared. He started down the catwalk.

"Hey!" Sandy called, when he choked his voice back into his throat, "what about ... I mean you ... well, your ship!" There are no inheritance laws among golden — only rights of plunder.

The golden glanced back. "I give it to you," he sneered. His shoulder must have been killing him, but he stepped into the lift like he was walking into a phone booth. That's a golden for you.

Sandy was horrified and bewildered. Behind his pitted ugliness there was that particularly wretched amazement only the totally vulnerable get when hurt.

"That's the first time you've ever seen an incident like that?" I felt sorry for him.

"Well, I wandered into Gerg's Bar a couple of hours after they had that massacre. But the ones who started it were drunk."

"Drunk or sober," I said. "Believe me, it doesn't mean that much difference to the way a man acts. I know." I shook my head. "I keep forgetting you've only been here three months."

Sandy, upset, looked down at the twisted blot on the flooring. "What about him? And the ship, boss?"

"I'll call the wagon to come scrape him up. The ship is yours."

"Huh?"

"He gave it to you. It'll stand up in court. It just takes one witness. Me."

"What am I gonna do with it? I mean I would have to haul it to a junk station to get the salvage. Look, Boss, I'm gonna give it to you. Sell it or something. I'd feel sort of funny with it anyway."

"I don't want it. Besides, then I'd be involved in the transaction and couldn't be a witness."

"I'll be a witness." Ratlit stepped from the lift. "I caught the whole bit when I came in the door. Great acoustics in this place." He whistled again. The echo came back. Ratlit closed his eyes a moment. "Ceiling is ... a hundred and twenty feet overhead, more or less. How's that, huh?"

"Hundred and twenty-seven," I said.

Ratlit shrugged. "I need more practice. Come on, Sandy, you give it to him, and I'll be a witness."

"You're a minor," Sandy said. Sandy didn't like Ratlit. I used to think it was because Ratlit was violent and flamboyant where Sandy was stolid and ugly. Even though Sandy kept protesting the temporariness of his job to me, I remember, when I first got to the Star-pit, those long-dying thoughts I'd had about leaving. It was a little too easy to see Sandy a mechanic here thirty years from now. I wasn't the only one it had happened to. Ratlit had been a grease monkey here three weeks. You tell me where he was going to be in three more. "Aren't you suppose to be working at Poloscki's?" Sandy said, turning back to the organum.

"Coffee break," Ratlit said. "If you're going to give it away, Sandy, can I have it?"

"So you can claim salvage? Hell, no."

"I don't want it for salvage. I want it for a present." Sandy looked up again. "Yeah. To give to someone else. Finish the tuneup and give it to me, okay?"

"You're nuts, kid-boy," Sandy said. "Even if I gave you the ship, what you gonna pay for the work with?"

"Aw, it'll only take a couple of hours. You're half done anyway. I figured you'd throw in the tuneup along with it. If you really want the money, I'll get it to you a little at a time. Vyme, what sort of professional discount will you give me? I'm just a grease monkey, but I'm still in the business."

I whacked the back of his red head, between a-little-too-playfully and not-too-hard. "Come on, kid-boy," I said. "Help me take care of puddles downstairs. Sandy, finish it up, huh?"

Sandy grunted and plunged both hands back into the organum.

As soon as the lift door closed, Ratlit demanded, "You gonna give it to me, Vyme?"

"It's Sandy's ship," I said.

"You tell him, and he will."

I laughed. "You tell me how the golden turned out when he came to. I assume that's who you want the ship for. What sort of fellow was he?"

Ratlit hooked his fingers in the mesh wall of the lift cage and leaned back. "They're only two types of golden." He began to swing

from side to side. "Mean ones and stupid ones." He was repeating a standard line around the Star-pit.

"I hope yours is stupid," I said, thinking of the two who'd just ruined Sandy's day and upset mine.

"Which is worse?" Ratlit shrugged. That is the rest of the line. When a golden isn't being outright mean, he exhibits the sort of nonthinkingness that gets other people hurt — you remember the one that nearly rammed my ship, or the ones who didn't bother to bring back the Kyber antitoxin? It can be worse than meanness. "But this one — " Ratlit stood up " — is unbelievably stupid."

"Yesterday you hated them. Today you want to give one a ship."

"He doesn't have one," Ratlit explained calmly, as though that warranted all change of attitude. "And because he's sick, it'll be hard for him to find work unless he has one of his own."

"I see." We bounced on the silicon cushion. I pushed open the door and started for the office. "What all went on after I left? I must have missed the best part of the evening."

"You did. Will I really need that much more sleep when I pass thirty-five?"

"Cut the cracks and tell me what happened."

"Well — " Ratlit leaned against the office door jamb while I dialed necrotics. "Alegra and I talked a. little after you left, till finally we realised the golden was awake and listening. Then he told us we were beautiful."

I raised an eyebrow. "Mmmm?"

"That's what we said. And he said it again, that watching us talk and think and build was one of the most beautiful things he'd ever seen. "What have you seen?" we asked him. And he began to tell us." Ratlit stopped breathing, something built up, then, at once it came out. "Oh, Vyme, the places he's been! The things he's done, the landscapes he's starved in, the hells where he's had to lie down and go to sleep he was that tired, or the heavens he's soared through screaming! Oh, the things he told us about! And Alegra made them almost real so we could all be there again, just like she used to do when she was a psychiatrist! The stories, the places, the things ... "

"Sounds like it was really something."

"It was nothing!" he came back vehemently. "It was all in the tears that wash your eyes, in the humming in your ears, in the taste of your own saliva. It was just a hallucination, Vyme! It wasn't real." Here his voice started cracking between the two octaves that were after it. "But that thing I told you about ... huge ... alive and dead at the same time, like a star ... way in another galaxy. Well, he's seen it. And last night, but it wasn't real of course, but ... I almost heard it ... singing!" His eyes were huge and green and bright. I felt envious of anyone who

could pull this reaction from kids like Alegra and Ratlit.

"So, we decided — " his voice fixed itself on the proper side of middle C — "after he went back to sleep, and we lay awake talking a while longer, that we'd try and help him get back out there. Because it's ... wonderful!"

"That's fascinating." When I finished my call, I stood up from the desk. I'd been sitting on the corner. "After work I'll buy you dinner and you can tell me all about the things he showed you."

"He's still there, at Alegra's," Ratlit said — helplessly, I realised after a moment. "I'm going back right after work."

"Oh," I said. I didn't seem to be invited.

"It's just a shame," Ratlit said when we came out of the office, "that he's *so* stupid." He glanced at the mess staining the concrete and shook his head.

I'd gone back to the books when Sandy stepped in. "All finished. What say we knock off for a beer or something, huh, boss?"

"All right." I said, surprised. Sandy was usually as social as he was handsome. "Want to talk about something?"

"Yeah." He looked relieved.

"That business this morning got to your head, huh?"

"Yeah," he repeated.

"There is a reason," I said as I made ready to go. "It's got something to do with the psychological part of being a golden. Meanness and stupidity, like everyone says. But however it makes them act here, it protects them from complete insanity at the twenty thousand light-year limit."

"Yeah. I know, I know." Sandy had started stepping uncomfortably from one boot to the other. "But that's not what I wanted to talk about."

"It isn't?"

"Um-um."

"Well?" I asked after a moment.

"It's that kid, the one you're gonna give the ship to."

"Ratlit?"

"Yeah."

"I haven't made up my mind about giving him the ship," I lied. "Besides, legally it's yours."

"You'll give it to him," Sandy said. "And I don't care, I mean not about the ship. But, boss, I gotta talk to you about that kid-boy."

Something about Sandy ...

I'd never realised he'd thought of Ratlit as more than a general nuisance. Also, he seemed sincerely worried about me. I was curious. It took him all the way to the bar and through two beers — while I

drank hot milk with honey — before he tongued and chewed what he wanted to say into shape.

"Boss, understand, I'm nearer Ratlit than you. Not only my age. My life's been more like his than yours has. You look at him like a son. To me, he's a younger brother: I taught him all the tricks. I don't understand him completely, but I see him clearer than you do. He's had a hard time, but not as hard as you think. He's gonna take you — and I don't mean money — for everything he can."

Where the hell that came from I didn't know and didn't like. "He won't take anything I don't want to give."

"Boss?" Sandy suddenly asked. "You got kids of your own?"

"Nine," I said. "Did have. I don't see the ones who're left now, for which their parents have always been just as happy — except one. And she was sensible enough to go along with the rest, while she was alive."

"Oh." Sandy got quiet again. Suddenly he went scrambling in his overall pouch and pulled out a three-inch porta-pix. Those great, greasy hands that I was teaching to pick up an egg shell through a five-hundred-to-one-ratio waldo were clumsily fumbling at the push-pull levers. "I got kids," he said. "See. Seven of them."

And on the porta-pix screen was a milling, giggling group of little apes that couldn't have been anybody else's. All the younger ones lacked was acne. They even shuffled back and forth from one foot to the other. They began to wave, and the speaker in the back chirped: "Hi, da! Hello, da! Da, mommy says to say we love you! Da, da, come home soon!"

"I'm not with them now," he said throatily. "But I'm going back soon as I get enough money so I can take them all out of that hell-hole they're in now and get the whole family with a decent sized proke-group. They're only twenty-three adults there now, and things were beginning to rub. That's why I left in the first place. It was getting so nobody could talk to anyone else. That's pretty rough on all our kids, thirty-two when I left. But soon I'll be able to fix that."

"On the salary I'm paying you?" This was the first I'd heard of any of this; that was my first reaction. My second, which I didn't voice, was, Then why the hell don't you take that ship and sell it somehow! Over forty and self-employed, the most romantic become monetarily practical.

Sandy's fist came down hard on the bar. "That's what I'm trying to say to you, boss! About you, about Ratlit. You've all got it in your heads that this, out here, is it! The end! Sure, you gotta accept limitations, but the right ones. Sure, you have to admit there are certain directions in which you can not go. But once you do that, you find there are others where you can go as far as you want. Look, I'm

not gonna hang around the Star-pit all my life. And if I make my way back toward galactic centre, make enough money so I can go home, raise my family the way I want, that's going forward, forward even from here. Not back."

"All right," I said. Quiet Sandy surprised me. I still wondered why he wasn't breaking his tail to get salvage on that ship that had just fallen into his hands, if getting back home with money in his pocket was that important. "I'm glad you told me about yourself. Now how does it all tie up with Ratlit?"

"Yeah. Ratlit." He put the porta-pix back in his overall pouch. "Boss, Ratlit is the kid your own could be. You want to give him the advice, friendship and concern he's never had, that you couldn't give yours. But Ratlit is also the kid I was about ten years ago, started no place, with no destination, and no values to help figure out the way, mixed up in all the wrong things, mainly because he's not sure where the right ones are."

"I don't think you're that much like Ratlit," I told him. "I think you may wish you were. You've done a lot of the things Ratlit's done? Ever write a novel?"

"I tried to write a trilogy," Sandy said. "It was lousy. But it pushed some things off my chest. So I got something out of it, even if nobody else did, which is what's important. Because now I'm a better mechanic for it, boss. Until I admit to myself what I can't do, it's pretty hard to work on what I can. Same goes for Ratlit. You too. That's growing up. And one thing you can't do is help Ratlit by giving him a ship he can't fly."

Growing up brought back the picture. "Sandy, did you ever build an ecologarium when you were a kid?"

"No." The word had the puzzled inflection that means, don't-even-know-what-one-is.

"I didn't either," I told him. Then I grinned and punched him in the shoulder. "Maybe you're a little like me, too? Let's get back to work."

"Another thing," Sandy said, not looking very happy as he got off the stool. "Boss, that kid's gonna hurt you. I don't know how, but it's gonna seem like he hunted for how to make it hurt most, too. That's what I wanted to tell you, boss."

I was going to urge him to take the ship, but he handed me the keys back in the hangar before I could say anything and walked away. When people who should be clearing up their own problems start giving you advice ... well, there was something about Sandy I didn't like.

If I can't take long walks at night with company, I take them by myself. I was strolling by the Edge, the world-wind was low, and the

stellar-plex, that huge heat-gathering mirror that hung nine thousand miles off the pit, was out. It looks vaguely like the moon used to look from Earth, only twice as big, perfectly silver, and during the three and a half days it faces us it's always full.

Then, up ahead where the fence was broken, I saw Ratlit kicking gravel over the Edge. He was leaning against a lamppost, his shirt ballooning and collapsing at his back.

"Hey, kid-boy! Isn't the golden still at Alegra's?"

Ratlit saw me and shrugged.

"What's the matter?" I asked when I reached him. "Ate dinner yet?"

He shrugged again. His body had the sort of ravenous metabolism that shows twenty-four hours without food. "Come on. I promised you a meal. Why so glum?"

"Make it something to drink."

"I know about your phony I.D." I told him. "But we're going to eat. You can have milk, just like me."

No protests, no dissertation on the injustice of liquor laws. He started walking with me.

"Come on, kid-boy, talk to gramps. Don't you want your ship anymore?"

Suddenly he clutched my forearm with white, bony fingers. My forearm is pretty thick, and he couldn't get his hands around it. "Vyme, you've got to make Sandy give it to me now! You've got to!"

"Kid-boy, talk to me."

"Alegra." He let go. "And the golden. Hate golden, Vyme. Always hate them. Because if you start to like one, and then start hating again, it's worse."

"What's going on? What are they doing?"

"He's talking. She's hallucinating. And neither one pays any attention to me."

"I see."

"You don't see. You don't understand about Alegra and me."

Then I was the only one who'd met the both of them who didn't.

"I know you're very fond of each other." More could be said.

Ratlit said more. "We don't even like each other that much, Vyme. But we need each other. Since she's been here, I get her medicine for her. She's too sick to go out much now. And when I have bad changes, or sometimes bright recognitions, it doesn't matter. I bring them to her, and she builds pictures of them for me, and we explore them together and ... learn about things. When she was a psychiatrist for the government, she learned an awful lot about how people tick. And she's got an awful lot to teach me, things I've got to know." Fifteen-year-old ex-psychiatrist drug addict? Same sort of precocity that produces

thirteen-year-old novelists. Get used to it. "I need her now almost as much as she needs her ... medicine."

"Have you told the golden you've got him a ship?"

"You didn't say I could have it yet."

"Well, I say so right now. Why don't we go back there and tell him he can be on his way? If we put it a little more politely, don't you think that'll do the trick?"

He didn't say anything. His face just got back a lot of its life.

"We'll go right after we eat. What the hell, I'll buy you a drink. I may even have one with you."

Alegra's was blinding when we arrived. "Ratlit, oh, you're back! Hello, Vyme! I'm so glad you're both here! Everything is beautiful tonight!"

"The golden," Ratlit said. "Where's the golden?"

"He's not here." A momentary throb of sadness dispelled with torturous joy. "But he's coming back!"

"Oh," Ratlit said. His voice echoed through the long corridors of golden absence winding the room. "Cause I got a ship for him. All his. Just had a tuneup. He can leave any time he wants to."

"Here're the keys," I said, taking them from my pouch for dramatic effect. "Happen to have them right here."

As I handed them to Ratlit there were fireworks, applause, a fanfare of brasses. "Oh, that's wonderful. Wonderful! Because guess what, Ratlit? Guess what, Vyme?"

"I don't know," Ratlit said. "What?"

"I'm a golden too!" Alegra cried from the shoulders of the cheering crowd that pushed its way through more admiring thousands.

"Huh?"

"I, me, myself am actually an honest to goodness golden. I just found out today."

"You can't be," Ratlit said.

"You're too old for it just to show up now."

"Something about my medicine," Alegra explained. "It's dreadfully complicated." The walls were papered with anatomical charts, music by Stockhausen. "Something in my medicine kept it from coming out until now, until a golden could come to me, drawing it up and out of the depths of me, till it burst out, beautiful and wonderful and ... golden! Right now he's gone off to Carlson Labs with a urine sample for a final hormone check. They'll tell him in an hour, and he'll bring back my golden belt. But he's sure already. And when he comes back with it, I'm going to go with him to the galaxies, as his apprentice. We're going to find a cure for his sickness and something that will make it so I won't need my medicine any more. He says if you have all the universe to roam around in, you can find anything you look for.

But you need it *all* — not just a cramped little cluster of a few billion stars off in a corner by itself. Oh, I'm free, Ratlit, like you always wanted to be! While you were gone, he ... well, did something to me that was *golden,* and it triggered my hormonal imbalance!" The image came in through all five senses. Breaking the melodious ecstasy came the clatter of keys as Ratlit hurled them at the wall.

I left feeling pretty odd. Ratlit had started to go too, but Alegra called him back. "Oh, now don't go on like that, Ratty! Act your age. Won't you stay and do me one little last favour?"

So he stayed. When I untangled myself from the place and was walking home, I kept on remembering what Alegra had said about love.

Work next day went surprisingly smoothly. Poloscki called me up about ten and asked if I knew where Ratlit was because he hadn't been at work that day. "You're sure the kid isn't sick?"

I said I'd seen him last night and that he was probably all right. Poloscki made a sort of disgusted sound and hung up.

Sandy left a few minutes early, as he'd been doing all week, to run over to the post office before it closed. He was expecting a letter from his group, he said. I felt strange about having given the ship away out from under him. It was sort of an immature thing to do. But he hadn't said anything about wanting it, and Ratlit was still doing Alegra favours, so maybe it would all work out for the best.

I thought about visiting Alegra that evening. But there was the last six-months' paper work, still not finished. I went into the office, plugged in the computer and got ready to work late.

I was still at it sometime after eleven when the entrance light blinked, which meant somebody had opened the hangar door. I'd locked it. Sandy had the keys so he could come in early. So it was Sandy. I was ready for a break and all set to jaw with him a while. He was always coming back to do a little work at odd hours. I waited for him to come into the office. But he didn't.

Then the needle on the power gauge, which had been hovering near zero with only the drain of the little office computer, swung up to seven. One of the big pieces of equipment had been cut in.

There was some cleanup work to do, but nothing for a piece that size. Frowning, I switched off the computer and stepped out of the office. The first great opening in the hangar roof was mostly blocked with the bulk of Ratlit's/Sandy's/my ship. Stellarplex light curved smoothly over one side, then snarled in the fine webbing of lifts, catwalks, haul-lines and grappler rigging. The other two were empty, and hundred-meter circles of silver dropped through assembly riggings to the concrete floor. Then I saw Sandy.

He stood just inside the light from the last opening, staring up at the Stellarplex, its glare lost in his ruined face. As he raised his left hand — when it started to move I thought it looked too big — light caught on the silver joints of the master-gauntlet he was wearing. I knew where the power was going.

As his hand went above his head, a shadow fell over him as a fifteen-foot slave talon swung from the darkness, its movement aping the master-glove. He dropped his hand in front of his face, fingers curved. Metal claws lowered about him, beginning to quiver. Something about the way ... he was trying to kill himself!

I started running toward those hesitant, gaping claws, leaped into the grip, and reached over his shoulder to slap my forearm into the control glove, just as he squeezed. Like I said, my forearm is big, but when those claws came together, it was a tight fit. Sandy was crying.

"You stupid," I shouted, "inconsiderate, bird-brained, infantile — " as I pried his fingers loose from my arm, the talons jerked open one at a time from around us — "asinine, idiotic — " at last I got the glove off — "puerile ... " Then I said, "What the hell is the matter with you?"

Sandy was sitting on the floor now, his head hung between his shoulders. He stank.

"Look," I said, manoeuvring the slave talon back into place with the gross-motion controls on the gauntlet's wrist, "if you want to go jump off the Edge, that's fine with me. Half the gate's down anyway. But don't come here and mess up my tools. You can squeeze your own head up a little, but you're not going to bust up my glove here. You're fired. Now tell me what's wrong."

"I knew it wasn't going to work. Wasn't even worth trying. I knew ... " His voice was getting all mixed up with the sobs. "But I thought maybe ... " Beside his left hand was the porta-pix, its screen cracked. And a crumpled piece of paper.

I turned off the glove, and the talons stopped humming twenty feet overhead. I picked up the paper and smoothed it out. I didn't mean to read it all the way through.

Dear Sanford,

Things have been difficult since you left but not too hard and I guess a lot of pressure is off everybody since you went away and the kids are getting used to your not being here though Bobbi-D cried a lot at first. She doesn't now. We got your letter and were glad to hear things had begun to settle down for you though Hank said you should have written before this and was very mad though Mary tried to calm him down but he just said, "When he married you all he married me too, damn it, and I've got just as much right to be angry at him as you have," which is true, Sanford, but I tell you what he said because it's a quote and I think you should know exactly what's being said,

especially since it expresses something we all feel on one level or another. You said you might be able to send us a little money, if we wanted you home, which I think would be very good, the money I mean, though Laura said if I put that in the letter she would divorce us, but she won't, and like Hank I've got a right to say what I feel which is, Yes I think you should send money, especially after that unpleasant business just before you left. But we are all agreed we do not want you to come back. And would rather not have the money if that's what it meant.

That is hard but true. As you can gather your letter caused quite an upset here. I would like — which makes me different from the others but is why they wanted me to write this letter — to hear from you again and keep track of what you are doing because I used to love you very much and I never could hate you. But like Bobbi-D, I have stopped crying.

Sincerely —

The letter was signed 'Joseph'. In the lower corner were the names of the rest of the men and women of the group.

"Sandy?"

"I knew they wouldn't take me back. I didn't even really try, did I? But — "

"Sandy, get up."

"But the *children*." he whispered. "What's gonna happen to the children?"

And there was a sound from the other end of the hangar. Three stories up the side of the ship in the open hatchway, silvered by Stellarplex light, stood the golden, the one Ratlit and I had found on the street. You remember what he looked like. He and Alegra must have sneaked in while Sandy and I were struggling with the waldo. Probably they wanted to get away as soon as possible before Ratlit made real trouble, or before I changed my mind and got the keys back. All this ship-giving had been done without witnesses. The sound was the lift rising toward the hatchway. "The children?" Sandy whispered again.

The door opened, and a figure stepped out in the white light. Only it was Ratlit! It was Ratlit's red hair, his gold earring, his bouncy run as he started for the hatch. And there were links of yellow metal around his waist.

Baffled, I heard the golden call: "Everything checks out inside, brother. She'll fly us anywhere."

And Ratlit cried, "I got the grapples all released, brother. Let's go!" Their voices echoed down through the hangar. Sandy raised his head, squinting.

As Ratlit leapt into the hatch, the golden caught his arm around

the boy's shoulder. They stood a moment, gazing at one another, then Ratlit turned to look down into the hangar, back on the world he was about to leave. I couldn't tell if he knew we were there or not. Even as the hatch swung closed, the ship began to whistle.

I hauled Sandy back into the shock chamber. I hadn't even locked the door when the thunder came and my ears nearly split. I think the noise surprised Sandy out of himself. It broke something up in my head, but the pieces were falling wrong.

"Sandy," I said, "we've got to get going!"

"Huh?" He was fighting the drunkenness and probably his stomach too.

"I don't wanna go nowhere."

"You're going anyway. I'm sure as hell not going to leave you alone."

When we were halfway up the stairs I figured she wasn't there. I felt just the same. Maybe she was with them in the ship.

"My medicine. Please can't you get my medicine? I've got to have my medicine, please, please ... please." I could just hear the small, high voice when I reached the door. I pushed it open.

Alegra lay on the mattress, pink eyes wide, white hair frizzled around her balding skull. She was incredibly scrawny, her uncut nails black as Sandy's nubs without the excuse of hours in a graphite-lubricated gauntlet. The translucency of her pigment-less skin under how-many-days of dirt made my flesh crawl. Her face drew in around her lips like the flesh about a scar. "My medicine. Vyme, is that you? You'll get my medicine for me, Vyme? Won't you get my medicine?" Her mouth wasn't moving, but the voice came on. She was too weak to project on any but the aural level. It was the first time I'd seen Alegra without her cloak of hallucination, and it brought me up short.

"Alegra," I said when I got hold of myself. "Ratlit and the golden went off on the ship."

"Ratlit. Oh, nasty Ratty, awful little boy! He wouldn't get my medicine. But you'll get it for me, won't you, Vyme? I'm going to die in about ten minutes, Vyme. I don't want to die. Not like this. The world is so ugly and painful now. I don't want to die here."

"Don't you have any?" I stared around the room I hadn't seen since Drunk-roach lived there. It was a lot worse. Dried garbage, piled first in one corner, now covered half the floor. The rest was littered with papers, broken glass, a spilled can of something unrecognisable for the mold, and a dead beetle.

"No. None here. Ratlit gets it from a man who hangs out in Gerg's over on Calle-X. Oh, Ratlit used to get it for me every day, such a nice little boy, every day he would bring me my lovely medicine. I never

had to leave my room at all. You go get it for me, Vyme."

"It's the middle of the night, Alegra! Gerg's is closed, and Calle-X is all the way across the pit anyway. Couldn't even get there in ten minutes, much less find this character and come back!"

"If I were well, Vyme, I'd fly you there in a cloud of light pulled by peacocks and porpoises, and you'd come back to hautboys and tambourines, bringing my beautiful medicine to me, in less than an eye's blink. But I'm sick now. And I'm going to die."

There was a twitch in the crinkled lid of one pink eye.

"Alegra, what happened!"

"Ratlit's insane!" she projected with shocking viciousness. I heard Sandy behind me catch his breath. "Insane at twenty thousand light-years, dead at twenty-five."

"But his golden belt ... "

"It was mine! It was my belt and he stole it. And he wouldn't get my medicine. Ratlit's not a golden. I'm a golden, Vyme! I can go anywhere, anywhere at all! I'm a golden golden golden ... But I'm sick now. I'm so sick."

"But didn't the golden know the belt was yours?"

"Him? Oh, he's so incredibly stupid! He would believe anything. The golden went to check some papers and get provisions and was gone all day, to get my belt. But you were here that night. I asked Ratlit to go get my medicine and take another sample to Carlson's for me. But neither of them came back till I was very sick, very weak. Ratlit found the golden, you see, told him that I'd changed my mind about going, and that he, Ratlit, was a golden as well, that he'd just been to Carlson's. So the golden gave him my belt and off they went."

"But how in the world would he believe a kid with a story like that?"

"You know how stupid a golden can be, Vyme. As stupid as they can be mean. Besides, it doesn't matter to him if Ratlit dies. He doesn't care if Ratlit was telling: the truth or not. The golden will live. When Ratlit starts drooling, throwing up blood, goes deaf first and blind last and dies, the golden won't even be sad. He's too stupid to feel sad. That's the way golden are. But I'm sad, Vyme, because no one will bring me my medicine."

My frustration had to lash at something; she was there. "You mean you didn't know what you were doing to Ratlit by leaving, Alegra? You mean you didn't know how much he wanted to get out, and how much he needed you at the same time? You couldn't see what it would do to him if you deprived him of the thing he needed and rubbed his nose in the thing he hated both at once? You couldn't guess that he'd pull something crazy? Oh, kid-girl, you talk about golden. You're the stupid one."

"Not stupid," she projected quietly. "*Mean,* Vyme. I knew he'd try to do something. I just didn't think he'd succeed. Ratlit is really such a child."

The frustration, spent, became rolling sadness. "Couldn't you have waited just a little longer, Alegra? Couldn't you have worked out the leaving some other way, not hurt him so much?"

"I wanted to get out, Vyme, to keep going and not be trapped. Like Ratlit wanted, like you want, like Sandy wants, like golden." For a moment I had forgotten Sandy and the golden. "Only I was cruel. I had the chance to do it and I took it. Why is that bad, Vyme? Unless, of course, that's what being free means."

A twitch in the eyelid again. It closed. The other stayed open.

"Alegra — "

"I'm a golden, Vyme. A golden. And that's how golden are. But don't be mad at me, Vyme. Don't. Ratlit was mean too, not to give me my medi — "

The other eye closed. I closed mine too and tried to cry, but my tongue was pushing too hard on the roof of my mouth.

Sandy came to work the next day, and I didn't mention his being fired. The teletapes got hold of it, and the leadlines tried to make the thing as sordid as possible:

X-CON TEENAGER (they didn't mention his novel) SLAYS JUNKIE SWEETHEART! DIES HORRIBLY!

They didn't mention the golden either. They never do.

Reporters pried around the hangar a while, trying to get us to say the ship was stolen. Sandy came through pretty well. "It was his ship," he grunted, putting lubricant in the gauntlets. "I gave it to him."

"What are you gonna give a kid like that a ship for? Maybe you loaned it to him. 'Dies horrible death in borrowed ship'. That sounds okay."

"Gave it to him. Ask the boss." He turned back toward the scaffolding. "He witnessed."

"Look, even if you liked the kid, you're not saving him anything by covering up."

"I didn't like him," Sandy said. "But I gave him the ship."

"Thanks," I told Sandy when they left, not sure what I was thanking him for, but still feeling very grateful. "I'll do you a favour back."

A week later Sandy came in and said, "Boss, I want my favour."

I narrowed my eyes against his belligerent tone. "So you're gonna quit at last. Can you finish out the week?"

He looked embarrassed, and his hands started moving around in his overall pouch. "Well, yeah. I am gonna leave. But not right away,

boss. It is getting a little hard for me to take, out here."

"You'll get used to it," I said. "You know there's something about you that's, well, a lot like me. I learned. You will too."

Sandy shook his head. "I don't think I want to." His hand came out of his pocket. "See, I got a ticket." In his dirty fingers was a metal-banded card. "In four weeks I'm going back in from the Star-pit. Only I didn't want to tell you just now, because, well, I did want this favour, boss."

I was really surprised. "You're not going back to your group," I said. "What are you going to do?"

He shrugged. "Get a job, I don't know. There're other groups. Maybe I've grown up a little bit." His fists went way down into his pouch, and he started to shift his weight back and forth on his feet. "About that favour, boss."

"What is it?"

"I got to talking to this kid outside. He's really had it rough, Vyme." That was the first and last time Sandy ever called me by name, though I'd asked him to enough times before. "And he could use a job."

A laugh got all set to come out of me. But it didn't, because the look on his ugly face, behind the belligerence, was so vulnerable and intense. Vulnerable? But Sandy had his ticket; Sandy was going on.

"Send him to Poloscki's," I said. "Probably needs an extra grease-monkey. Now let me get back to work, huh?"

"Could you take him over there?" Sandy said very quickly. "That's the favour, boss."

"Sandy, I'm awfully busy." I looked at him again. "Oh, all right."

"Hey, boss," Sandy said as I slid from behind the desk, "remember that thing you asked me if I ever had when I was a kid?"

It took a moment to come back to me. "You mean an ecologarium?"

"Yeah. That's the word." He grinned. "The kid-boy's got one. He's right outside, waiting for you."

"He's got it with him?"

Sandy nodded.

I walked toward the hangar door picturing some kid lugging around a six-by-six plastic cage.

Outside the boy was sitting on a fuel hydrant. I'd put a few trees there, and the 'day'-light from the illumination tubes arcing the street dappled the gravel around him.

He was about fourteen, with copper skin and curly black hair. I saw why Sandy wanted me to go with him about the job. Around his waist, as he sat hunched over on the hydrant with his toes spread on metal base-flange, was a wide-linked belt: golden.

He was looking through an odd jewel-and-brass thing that hung

from a chain around his neck.

"Hey."

He looked up. There were spots of light on his blue-black hair.

"You need a job?"

He blinked.

"My name's Vyme. What's yours?"

"You call me An." The voice was even, detached, with an inflection that is golden.

I frowned. "Nickname?"

He nodded.

"And really?"

"Androcles."

"Oh." My oldest kid is dead. I know it because I have all sorts of official papers saying so. But sometimes it's hard to remember. And it doesn't matter whether the hair is black, white, or red. "Well, let's see if we can put you to work somewhere. Come on." An stood up, eyes fixed, on me, suspicion hiding behind high glitter. "What's the thing around your neck?"

His eyes struck it and bounced back to my face. "Cousin?" he asked.

"Huh?" Then I remembered the golden slang. "Oh, sure. First cousins. Brothers if you want."

"Brother," An said. Then a smile came tumbling out of his face, silent and volcanic. He began loping beside me as we started off toward Poloscki's. "This — " he held up the thing on the chain " — is an ecologarium. Want to see?" His diction was clipped, precise and detached. But when an expression caught on his face, it was unsettlingly intense.

"Oh, a little one. With microorganisms?"

An nodded.

"Sure. Let's have a look."

The hair on the back of his neck pawed the chain as he bent to remove it.

I held it up to see.

Some blue liquid, a fairly large air bubble and a glob of black-speckled jelly in a transparent globe, the size of an eyeball; it was set in two metal rings, one within the other, pivoted so die globe turned in all directions. Mounted on the outside ring was a curved tongue of metal at the top of which was a small tube with a pin-sized lens. The tube was threaded into a bushing, and I guess you used it to look at what was going on in the sphere.

"Self-contained," explained An. "The only thing needed to keep the whole thing going is light. Just about any frequency will do, except way up on the blue end. And the shell cuts that out."

I looked through the brass eyepiece.

I'd swear there were over a hundred life forms with five to fifty stages each: spores, zygotes, seeds, eggs, growing and developing through larvae, pupae, buds, reproducing through sex, syzygy, fission. And the whole ecological cycle took about two minutes.

Spongy masses like red lotuses clung to the air bubble. Every few seconds one would expel a cloud of black things like wrinkled bits of carbon paper into the gas where they were attacked by tiny motes I could hardly see even with the lens. Black became silver. It fell back to the liquid like globules of mercury, and coursed toward the jelly that was emitting a froth of bubbles. Something in the froth made the silver beads reverse direction. They reddened, sent out threads and alveoli, until they reached the main bubble again as lotuses.

The reason the lotuses didn't crowd each other out was because every eight or nine seconds a swarm of green paramecia devoured most of them. I couldn't tell where they came from; I never saw one of them split or get eaten, but they must have had something to do with the thorn-balls — if only because there were either thorn-balls or paramecia floating in the liquid, but never both at once.

A black spore in the jelly wiggled, then burst the surface as a white worm. Exhausted, it laid a couple of eggs, rested until it developed fins and a tail, then swam to the bubble where lay more eggs among the lotuses. Its fins grew larger, its tail shriveled splotches of orange and blue would appear, till it took off like a weird butterfly to sail around the inside of the bubble. The motes that silvered the black offspring of the lotus must have eaten the parti-coloured fan because it just grew thinner and frailer till it disappeared. The eggs by the Lotus would hatch into bloated fish forms that swam back through the froth to vomit a glob of jelly on the mass at the bottom, then collapse. The first eggs didn't do much except turn into black spores when they were covered with enough jelly.

All this was going on amidst a kaleidoscope of frail, wilting flowers and blooming jeweled webs, vines and worms, warts and jelly fish, symbiotes and saprophytes, while rainbow herds of algae careened back and forth like glittering confetti. One rough-rinded galoot, so big you could see him without the eyepiece, squatted on the wall, feeding on jelly, batting his eye-spots while the tide surged through tears of gills.

I blinked as I took it from my eye.

"That looks complicated." I handed it back to him.

"Not really." He slipped it around his neck. "Took me two weeks with a notebook to get the whole thing figured out. You saw the big fellow?"

"The one who winked?"

"Yes. Its reproductive cycle is about two hours, which trips you up at first. Everything else goes so fast. But once you see him mate with the thing that looks like a spider web with sequins — same creature, different sex — and watch the offspring aggregate into paramecia, then dissolve again, the whole thing falls into — "

"One creature!" I said. "The whole thing is a single creature!"

An nodded vigorously. "Has to be to stay self-contained." The grin on his face whipped away like a snapped window shade. A very serious look was underneath. "Even after I saw the big fellow mate, it took me a week to understand it was all one."

"But if goofus and the fishnet have paramecia — " I began. It seemed logical when I made the guess.

"You've seen one before."

I shook my head. "Not like that one, anyway. I once saw something similar, but it was much bigger, about six feet across."

An's seriousness was replaced by quivering horror. I mean he really started to shake. "How could you ... *ever* even *see* all the ... stuff inside, much less *catalogue* it? You say ... *this* is complicated?"

"Hey, relax. Relax!" I said. He did. Like that. "It was much simpler," I explained and went on to describe the one our kids had made so many years ago as best I remembered.

"Oh," An said at last, his face set in its original impassivity. "It wasn't microorganisms. Simple. Yes." He looked at the pavement. "Very simple." When he looked up, another expression had scrambled his features. It took a moment to identify. "I don't see the point at all!"

There was surprising physical surety in the boy's movement; his nervousness was a cat's, not a human's. But it was one of the psychological qualities of golden.

"Well," I said, "it showed the kids a picture of the way the cycles of life progress."

An rattled his chain. "That is why they gave us these things. But everything in the one you had was so primitive. It wasn't a very good picture."

"Don't knock it," I told him. "When I was a kid, all I had was an ant-colony. I got my infantile Weltanschauung watching a bunch of bugs running around between two plates of glass. I think I would have been better prepared by a couple of hungry rats on a treadmill. Or maybe a torus-shaped fish tank alternating sharks with schools of piranhas: Get them all chasing around after each other real fast — "

"Ecology wouldn't balance," An said. "You'd need snails to get rid of the waste. Then a lot of plants to re-oxygenate the water, and some sort of herbivore to keep down the plants because they'd tend to choke out everything since neither the sharks nor the piranhas would eat them." Kids and their damn literal minds. "And if the herbivores had

some way to keep the sharks off, then you might do it."

"What's wrong with the first one I described?"

The explanation worked around the muscles of his face. "The lizards, the segment worms, the plants, worts, all their cycles were completely circular. They were born, grew up, reproduced, maybe took care of the kids a while, then died. Their only function was reproduction. That's a pretty awful picture." He made an unintelligible face.

Something about this wise-alecky kid who was golden, younger than Alegra, older than Ratlit, I liked.

"There are stages in here," An tapped his globe with his pinky nail, "that don't get started on their most important functions till after they've reproduced and grown up through a couple more metamorphoses as well. Those little green worms are a sterile end stage of the blue feathery things. But they put out free phosphates that the algae live on. Everything else, just about, lives on the algae — except the thorn balls. They eat the worms when they die. There's phagoytes in there that ingest the dust-things when they get out of the bubble and start infecting the liquid." All at once he got very excited. "Each of us in the class got one of these! They made us figure them out! Then we had to prepare these recordings on whether the reproductive process was the primary function in life or an adjunctive one." Something white frothed the corners of his mouth. "I think grownups should just *leave* their kids the hell *alone,* go on and do something *else,* stop bothering us! That's what I said! That's what I *told* them!" He stopped, his tongue flicked the foam at the cusp of his lips; he seemed all right again.

"Sometimes," I said evenly, "if you leave them alone and forget about them, you end up with monsters who aren't kids any more. If you'd been left alone, you wouldn't have had a chance to put your two cents in in the first place, and you wouldn't have that thing around your neck." And he was really trying to follow what I was saying. A moment past his rage, his face was as open and receptive as a two-year-old's. God, I want to stop thinking about Antoni!

"That's not what I mean." He wrapped his arms around his shoulders and bit on his forearm pensively.

"An, you're not stupid, kid-boy. You're cocky, but I don't think you're mean. You're golden." There was all my resentment, out now, Ratlit. There it is, Alegra. I didn't grow up with the word, so it meant something different to me. An looked up to ingest my meaning. The toothmarks were white on his skin, then red around that. "How long have you been one?"

He watched me, arms still folded. "They found out when I was seven."

"That long ago?"

"Yes." He turned and started walking again. "I was very precocious."

"Oh." I nodded. "Just about half your life then. How's it been, little brother, being a golden?"

An dropped his arms. "They take you away from your group a lot of times." He shrugged. "Special classes. Training programs. I'm psychotic"

"I never would have guessed." What would you call Ratlit or Alegra?

"I know it shows. But it gets us through the psychic pressures at the reality breakdown at twenty thousand light-years. It does. For the past few years, though, they've been planting the psychosis artificially, pretty far down in the preconscious, so it doesn't affect our ordinary behavior as much as it does the older ones. They can use this process on anybody whose hormone system is even close to golden. They can get a lot more and a lot better quality golden that way than just waiting for us to pop up by accident."

As I laughed, something else struck me. "Just what do you need a job out here for, though? Why not hitch out with some cousin or get a job on one of the intergalactics as an apprentice?"

"I have a job in another galaxy. There'll be a ship stopping for me in two months to take me out. A whole lot of Star-pits have been established in galaxies halfway to Undok. I'll be going back and forth, managing roboi-equipment, doing managerial work. I thought it would be a good idea to get some practical experience out here before I left."

"Precocious," I nodded. "Look, even with roboi-equipment you have to know one hell of a lot about the inside of how many different kinds of keeler drives. You're not going to get that kind of experience in two months as a grease-monkey. And roboi-equipment? I don't even have any in my place. Poloscki's got some, but I don't think you'll get your hands on it."

"I know a good deal already," An said with, strained modesty.

"Yeah?" I asked him a not too difficult question and got an adequate answer. Made me feel better that he didn't come back with something really brilliant. I did know more than he did. "Where'd you learn?"

"They gave me the information the same way they implanted my psychosis."

"You're pretty good for your age." Dear old Luna Vocational! Maybe educational methods have improved a bit. "Come to think of it, I was just as old as you when I started playing around with those keeler models. Dozens and dozens of helical inserts — "

"And those oily organum sensitives in all that graphite. Yes, brother. But I've never even had my hands in a waldo."

I frowned. "Hell, when I was younger than you, I could — " I stopped. "Of course, with roboi-equipment, you don't need them. But it's not a bad thing to know how they work, just in case."

"That's why I want a job." He hooked one finger on his chain. "Brother-in-law Sandy and I got to talking, so I asked him about working here. He said you might help me get in someplace."

"I'm glad he did. My place only handles big ships, and it's all waldo. Me and an assistant can do the whole thing. Poloscki's place is smaller, but handles both inter-and intragalactic jobs, so you got more variety and a bigger crew. You find Poloscki, say I sent you, tell what you can do and why you're out here. Belt or no, you'll probably get something better than a monkey."

"Thanks, brother."

We turned off Calle-D. Poloscki's hangar was ahead. Dull thunder sounded over the roof as a ship departed.

"As soon as I despair of the younger generation," I told him, "one of you kids comes by and I start to think there's hope. Granted you're a psychopath, you're a lot better than some of your older, distant relations."

An looked up at me, apprehensive.

"You've never had a run-in with some of your cousins out here. But don't be surprised if you're dead tomorrow and your job's been inherited by some character who decided to split your head open to check on what's inside. I try to get used to you, behaving like something that isn't even savage. But, boy-kid, can your kind really mess up a guy's picture of the world."

"And what the hell do you expect us to act like?" An shot back. Spittle glittered on his lips again. "What would *you* do if you were trapped like us?"

"Huh?" I said questioningly. "*You,* trapped?"

"Look." A spasm passed over his shoulders. "The psycho-technician who made sure I was properly psychotic *wasn't* a golden, *brother!* You *pay* us to bring back the weapons, dad! *We* don't fight your damn wars, *grampa ! You're* the ones who take us away from our groups, say we're *too* valuable to submit to *your* laws, then deny us our heredity because we don't *breed* true, no-relative-of-*mine!*"

"Now, wait a minute!"

An snatched the chain from around his neck and held it taut in front of him. His voice ground to a whisper, his eyes glittered. "I strangled one of my classmates with this chain, the one I've got in my hands now." One by one, his features blanked all expression. "The teacher took it away from me for a week, as punishment for killing the

little girl."

The whisper stopped decibels above silence, then went on evenly. "Out here, nobody will punish me. And my reflexes are faster than yours."

Fear lashed my anger as I followed the insanity flickering in his eyes.

"Now!" He made a quick motion with his hands; I ducked. "I give it to you!" He flung the chain toward me. Reflexively I caught it. An turned away instantly and stalked into Poloscki's.

When I burst through the rattling hangar door at my place, the lift was coming down. Sandy yelled through the mesh walls, "Did he get the job?"

"Probably," I yelled back, going toward the office.

I heard the cage settle on the silicon cushion. Sandy was at my side a moment later, grinning. "So how do you like my brother-in-law, Androcles?"

"Brother-in-law?" I remembered An using the phrase, but I'd thought it was part of the slang golden. Something about the way Sandy said it though. "He's your *real* brother-in-law?"

"He's Joey's kid brother. I didn't want to say anything until after you met him." Sandy came along with me toward the office door. "Joey wrote me again and said since An was coming out here he'd tell him to stop by and see me and maybe I could help him out."

"Now how the hell am I supposed to know who Joey is?" I pushed open the door. It banged the wall.

"He's one of my husbands, the one who wrote me that letter you told me you'd read."

"Oh, yeah. Him." I started stacking papers.

"I thought it was pretty nice of him after all that to tell An to look me up when he got out here. It means there's still somebody left who doesn't think I'm a complete waste. So what do you think of Androcles?"

"He's quite a boy." I scooped up the mail that had come in after lunch, started to go through it but put it down to hunt for my coveralls.

"An used to come visit us when he got his one weekend a month off from his training program as golden," Sandy was going on. "Joey's and An's parents lived in the reeds near the estuary. But we lived back up the canyon by Chroma Falls. An and Joey were pretty close, even though Joey's my age and An was only eight or nine back then. I guess Joey was the only one who really knew what An was going through, since they were both golden."

Surprised and shocked, I turned back to the desk. "You were

married with a golden?" One of the letters on the top of the pile was addressed to Alegra, from Carlson's Labs. I had a carton of the kids' junk in the locker and had gotten the mail — there wasn't much — sent to the hangar, as though I were waiting for somebody to come for it.

"Yeah," Sandy said, surprised at my surprise. "Joey."

So I wouldn't stand there gaping, I picked up Alegra's letter.

"Since the traits that are golden are polychromazoic, it dies out if they only breed with each other. There's a big campaign back in galactic centre to encourage them to join heterogeneous proke-groups."

"Like blue-point Siamese cats, huh?" I ran my blackened thumbnail through the seal.

"That's right. But they're *not* animals, boss. I remember what they put that kid-boy through for psychotic reinforcement of the factors that were golden to make sure they stuck. It tore me up to hear him talk about it when he'd visit us."

I pulled a porta-pix out of Alegra's envelope. Carlson's tries to personalise its messages.

"I'm sure glad they can erase the conscious memory from the kids' minds when they have to do that sort of stuff."

"Small blessings and all that," I said, flipping the porta-pix on.

Personalised but mass produced. " ... blessed addit ... " the little speaker echoed me. Poloscki and I had used Carlson's a couple of times, I know. I guess every other mechanic up here had too. The porta-pix had started in the middle. Now it hummed back to the beginning.

"You know," Sandy went on, "Joey was different, yeah, sort of dense about some things ... "

"Alegra," beamed the chic, grandmotherly type Carlson's always uses for messages of this sort, "we were so glad to receive the urine sample you sent us by Mr. Ratlit last Thursday ... "

" ... even so, Joey was one of the sweetest men or women I've ever known. He was the easiest person in the group to live with Maybe it was because he was away a lot ... "

" ... and now, just a week later — remember, Carlson's gives results immediately and confirms them by personalised porta-pix in seven days — we are happy to tell you that there will be a blessed addition to your group. However ... "

" ... All right, he was different, reacted funny to a lot of things. But nothing like this rank, destructive stupidity you find out here at the Star-pit ... "

" ... the paternity is not Mr. Ratlit's. If you are interested, for your

eugenic records, in further information, please send us other possible urine samples from the men in your group, and we will be glad to confirm paternity ... "

" ... I can't understand the way people act out here, boss. And that's why I'm pushing on."

" ... Thank you so much for letting us give you this wonderful news. Remember, when in doubt, call Carlson's."

I said to Sandy, "You were married with — you loved a golden?"

Unbidden, the porta-pix began again. I flipped it off without looking.

"Sandy," I said, "you were hired because you were a fair mechanic and you kept off my back. Do what you're paid for. Get out of here!"

"Oh. Sure, boss." He backed quickly from the office.

I sat down.

Maybe I'm old fashioned, but when someone runs off and abandons a sick girl like that, it gets me. That was the trip to Carlson's, the one last little favour Ratlit never came back from. On the spot results, and formal confirmation in seven days In her physical condition, pregnancy would have been as fatal as the withdrawal. And she was too ill for any abortive method I know of not to kill her. On the spot results. Ratlit must have known all that too when he got the results back, the results that Alegra was probably afraid of, the results she sent him to find. Ratlit knew Alegra was going to die anyway. And so he stole a golden belt. "Loving someone, I mean really loving someone — " Alegra had said. When someone runs off and leaves a sick girl like that, there's got to be a reason. It came together for me like two fissionables. The explosion cut some moorings in my head I thought were pretty solidly fixed.

I pulled out the books, plugged in the computer, unplugged it, put the books away and stared into the ecologarium in my fist.

Among the swimming, flying, crawling things, mating, giving birth, growing, changing, busy at whatever their business was, I picked out those dead-end green worms. I hadn't noticed them before because they were at the very edge of things, bumping against the wall. After they released their free phosphates and got tired of butting the shell, they turned on each other and tore themselves to pieces.

Fear and anger is a bad combination in me.

I came close to being killed by a golden once, through that meanness and stupidity.

The same meanness and stupidity that killed Alegra and Ratlit.

And now when this damn kid threatens to — I mean at first I had thought he was threatening to —

I reached Gerg's a few minutes after the daylights went out and

the street lamps came on. But I'd stopped in nearly a dozen places on the way. I remember trying to explain to a sailor from a star-shuttle who was just stopping over at the Star-pit for the first time and was all upset because one woman golden had just attacked another with a broken glass. I remember saying to the three-headed bulge of his shoulder, " ... an ant-colony! You know what it is, two pieces of glass with dirt between them, and you can see all the little ants make tunnels and hatch eggs and stuff When I was a kid, I had an ant-colony ... " I started to shake my hand in his face. The chain from the ecologarium was tangled up in my fingers.

"Look." He caught my wrist and put it down on the counter. "It's all right now, pal. Just relax."

"You look," I said as he turned away. "When I was a kid, all I had was an *ant*-colony!"

He turned back and leaned his rusty elbow on the bar. "Okay," he said affably. Then he made the most stupid and frustrating mistake he possibly could have just then. "What about your aunt?"

"My mother."

"I thought you were telling me about your aunt?"

"Naw," I said. "My aunt, she drank too much. This is about my mother."

"All right. Your mother then."

"My mother, see, she always worried about me, getting sick and things. I got sick a lot when I was a Little kid. She made me mad! Used to go down and watch the ships take off from a place they called the Brooklyn Navy Yards. They were ships that went to the stars."

The sailor's Oriental face grinned. "Yeah, me too. Used to watch 'em when I was a kid."

"But it was raining, and she wouldn't let me go!"

"Aw, that's too bad. Little rain never hurt a kid. Why didn't she call up and have it turned off so you could go out? Too busy to pay attention to you, huh? One of my old men was like that."

"Both of mine were," I said. "But not my ma. She was all over me all the time when she was there. But she made me mad!"

He nodded with real concern. "Wouldn't turn off the rain."

"Naw, couldn't. You didn't grow up where I did, narrow-minded, dark-side world. No modern conveniences."

"Off the main trading routes, huh?"

"Way off. She wouldn't let me go out, and that made me mad."

He was still nodding.

"So I broke it!" My fist came down hard on the counter, and the plastic globe in its brass cage clacked on the wood. "Broke it! Sand, glass all over the rug, on the window sill!"

"What'd you break?"

"Smashed it, stamped on it, threw sand whenever she tried to make me stop!"

"Sand? You lived on a beach? We had a beach when I was a kid. A beach is nice for kids. What'd you break?"

"Let all the damn bugs out. Bugs in everything for days. Let 'em all out."

"Didn't have no bugs on our beach. But you said you were off the main trading routes."

"Let 'em *out*." I banged my fist again. "Let *everybody* out, whether they like it or not! It's their problem whether they make it, not mine! Don't care, I don't — " was laughing now.

"She let you go out, and you didn't care?"

My hand came down on top of the metal cage, hard. I caught my breath at the pain. "On our beach," I said, turning my palm up to look. There were red marks across it. "There weren't any bugs on our beach." Then I started shaking.

"You mean you were just putting me on, before, about the bugs. Hey, are you all right?"

" ... broke it," I whispered. Then I smashed fist and globe and chain into the side of the counter. "Let 'em *out*!" I whirled away, clutching my bruised hand against my stomach.

"*Watch* it, kid-boy!"

"I'm not a kid-boy!" I shouted. "You think I'm some stupid, half-crazy kid!"

"So you're older than me. Okay?"

"I'm not a kid any more!"

"So you're ten years older than Sirius, all right? Quiet down, or they'll kick us out."

I bulled out of Gerg's. A couple of people came after me because I didn't watch where I was going. I don't know who won, but I remember somebody yelling, "Get out! Get out!" It may have been me.

I remember later, staggering under the mercury street lamp, the world-wind slapping my face, stars swarming back and forth below me, gravel sliding under my boots, the toes inches over the Edge. The gravel clicked down the metal siding, the sound terribly clear as I reeled in the loud wind, shaking my arm against the night.

As I brought my hand back, the wind lashed the cold chain across my cheek and bridge of my nose. I lurched back, trying to claw it away. But it stayed all tanged on my fingers while the globe swung, gleaming in the street light. The wind roared. Gravel chattered down the siding.

Later, I remember the hangar door ajar, stumbling into the darkness, so that in a moment I was held from plummeting into nothing only by my own footsteps as black swerved around me. I

stopped when my hip hit a work bench. I pawed around under the lip of the table till I found a switch. In the dim orange light, racked along the back of the bench in their plastic shock-cases were the row of master-gauntlets. I slipped one out and slid my hand into it.

"Who's over there?"

"Go 'way, Sandy." I turned from the bench, switched up the power on the wrist controls. Somewhere in the dark above, a fifteen-foot slavehand hummed into life.

"Sorry, buster. This isn't Sandy. Put that down and get away from there."

I squinted as the figure approached in the orange light, hand extended, I saw the vibra-gun and didn't bother to look at the face.

Then the gun went down. "Vyme, baby? That you? What the hell are you doing here this hour of the night?"

"Poloscki?"

"Who'd you think it was?"

"Is this your — ?" I looked around, shook my head. "But I thought it was my — " I shook my head again.

Poloscki sniffed. "Hey, have you been a naughty kid-boy tonight!"

I swung my hand, and the slavehand overhead careened twenty feet.

The gun jumped. "Look, you mess up my waldo and I will kill you, don't care who you are! Take that thing off."

"Very funny." I brought the talon down where I could see it clawing shadow.

"Come on, Vyme. I'm serious. Turn it off and put it down. You're a mess now and you don't know what you're doing."

"That kid, the golden. Did you give him a job?"

"Sure. He said you sent him. Smart so and so. He rehulled a little yacht with the roboi-anamechaniakatasthysiser, just to show me what he could do. If I knew a few more people who could handle them that well, I'd go all roboi. He's not worth a damn with a waldo, but as long as he's got that little green light in front of him, he's fine."

I brought the talons down another ten feet so that the spider hung between us. "Well, I happen to be very handy with a waldo, Poloscki."

"Vyme, you're gonna get *hunt* ... "

"Poloscki," I said, "will you stop coming on like an over-protective aunt? I don't need another one."

"You're very drunk, Vyme."

"Yeah. But I'm no clumsy kid-boy who is going to mess up your equipment."

"If you do, you'll be — "

"Shut up and watch." I pulled the chain out of my pouch and tossed it onto the concrete floor. In the orange light you couldn't tell

whether the cage was brass or silver.

"What's that?"

The claws came down, and the fine-point tips, millimeters above the floor, closed on the ecologarium.

"Oh, hey! I haven't seen one of those since I was ten. What are you going to do with it? Those are five-hundred-to-one strength, you know. You're gonna break it."

"That's right. Break this one too."

"Aw, come on. Let me see it first."

I lifted the globe. "Could be an eggshell," I said. "Drunk or sober I can handle this damn equipment, Poloscki."

"I haven't seen one for years. Used to have one."

"You mean it wasn't spirited back from some distant galaxy by a golden, from some technology beyond our limited ken?"

"Product of the home spiral. Been around since the fifties."

I raised it over Poloscki's extended hand.

"They're supposed to be very educational. What do you want to break it for?"

"I never saw one."

"You came from someplace off the routes, didn't you? They weren't that common. Don't break it?"

"I want to."

"Why, Vyme?"

Something got wedged in my throat. "Because I want to get out, and if it's not that globe, its going to be somebody's head." Inside the gauntlet my hand began to quiver. The talons jerked. Poloscki caught the globe and jumped back.

"Vyme!"

"I'm hanging, here at the Edge." My voice kept getting caught on the things in my throat. "I'm useless, with a bunch of monsters and fools!" The talons swung, contracted, clashed on each other. "And then when the children ... when the *children* get so bad you can't even reach them ... " The claw opened, reached for Poloscki who jumped back in the half-dark. "Damn it, Vyme — "

" ... can't even reach the children any more." The talon stopped shaking, came slowly back, knotting. "I want to break something and get out. Very childishly, yes. Because nobody is paying any attention to *me*." The fist jumped. "Even when I'm trying to help. I *don't* want to hurt anybody any *more*. I *swear* it, so help me, I swear — "

"Vyme, take off the glove and listen!"

I raised the slavehand because it was about to scrape the cement.

"Vyme. I want to pay some attention to you. Slowly Poloscki walked back into the orange light. "You've been sending me kids for five years now, coming around and checking up on them, helping

them out of the stupid scrapes they get in. They haven't all been Ratlits. I like kids too. That's why I take them on. I think what you do is pretty great. Part of me loves kids. Another part of me loves you."

"Aw, Poloscki ... " I shook my head. Somewhere disgust began.

"It doesn't embarrass me. I love you a little and wouldn't mind loving you a lot. More than once I've thought about asking you to start a group."

"Please, Poloscki. I've had too many weird things happen to me this week. Not tonight, huh?" I then turned the power off in the glove.

"Love shouldn't frighten you, no matter when or how it comes, Vyme. Don't run from it. A marriage between us? Yeah, it would be a little hard for somebody like you, at first. But you'd get used to it before long. Then when kids came around, there'd be two — "

"I'll send Sandy over," I said. "He's the big-hearted, marrying kind. Maybe he's about ready to try again." I pulled off the glove.

"Vyme, don't go out like that. Stay for just a minute."

"Poloscki," I said, "I'm just not that god damn drunk!" I threw the glove on the table.

"Please, Vyme."

"You're gonna use your gun to keep me here?"

"Don't be like — "

"I hope the kids I send over here appreciate you more than I do right now. I'm sorry I busted in here. Good night!"

I turned from the table.

Nine thousand miles away the Stellarplex turned too. Circles of silver dropped through the roof. Behind the metal cage of the relaxed slave-claw I saw Poloscki's large, injured eyes, circles of crushed turquoise, glistening now.

And nine feet away someone said, "Ma'am?"

Poloscki glanced over her shoulder. "An, you awake?"

An stepped into the silver light, rubbing his neck. "That office chair is pretty hard, sister."

"He's here?" I asked.

"Sure," Poloscki said. "He didn't have any place to stay so I let him sleep in the office while I finished up some work in the back. Vyme, I meant what I said. Leave if you want, but not like this. Untwist."

"Poloscki," I said,, "you're very sweet, you're fun in bed, and a good mechanic too. But I've been there before. Asking me to join a group is like asking me to do something obscene. I know what I'm worth."

"I'm also a good businesswoman. Don't think that didn't enter my head when I thought about marrying you." An came and stood beside her. He was breathing hard, the way an animal does when you wake it all of a sudden.

"Poloscki, you said it, I didn't: I'm a mess. That's why I'm not with my own group now."

"You're not always like this. I've never seen you touch a drop before."

"For a while," I said, "it happened with disgusting frequency. Why do you think my group dropped me?"

"Must have been a while ago. I've know you a long time. So you've grown up since then. Now it only happens every half dozen years or so. Congratulations. Come have some coffee. An, run into the office and plug in the pot. I showed you where it was." An turned like something blown by the world-wind and was gone in shadow. "Come on," Poloscki said. She took my arm, and I came with her. Before we left the light, I saw my reflection in the polished steel tool-cabinet.

"Aw, no." I pulled away from her. "No, I better go home now."

"Why? An's making coffee."

"The kid. I don't want the kid to see me like this."

"He already has. Won't hurt him. Come on."

When I walked into Poloscki's office, I felt I didn't have a damn thing left. No. I had one. I decided to give it away.

When An turned to me with the cup, I put my hands on his shoulders. He jumped, but not enough to spill the coffee. "First and last bit of alcoholic advice for the evening, kid-boy. Even if you are crazy, don't go around telling people who are not golden how they've trapped you. That's like going to Earth and complimenting a nigger on how well he sings and dances and his great sense of rhythm. He may be able to tap seven with one hand against thirteen with the other while whistling a tone row. It still shows a remarkable naïvete about the way things are." That's one of the other things known throughout the galaxy about the world I come from. When I say primitive, I mean primitive.

An ducked from under my hands, put the coffee on the desk, and turned back. "I didn't say you trapped us."

"You said we treated you lousy and exploited you, which we may, and that this trapped you — "

"I said you exploited us, which you do, *and* that we were trapped. I *didn't* say by what."

Poloscki sat down on the desk, picked up my coffee and sipped it.

I raised my head. "All right. Tell me how you're trapped."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Poloscki said. "I started drinking your coffee."

"Shut up. How are you trapped, An?"

He moved his shoulders around as though he was trying to get them comfortable. "It started in Tyber-44 cluster. Golden were coming back with really bad psychic shock."

"Yes. I'd heard about it. That was a few; years back."

An's face started to twitch; the muscles around his eyes twisted below the skin. "*Something* out there ... "

I put my hand on the back of his neck, my thumb in the soft spot behind his ear and began to stroke, the way you get a cat to calm down. "Take it easy. Just tell me."

"Thanks," An said and bent his head forward. "We found them first in Tyber-44, but then they turned up all *over,* on half the planets in every galaxy that could support any life, and a lot more that shouldn't have been able to at all." His breathing grew coarser. I kept rubbing, and it slowed again. "I guess we have such a funny psychology that working with them, studying them, even thinking about them too much ... there's something about them, that changes our sense of reality. The shock was bad."

"An," I said, "to be trapped, there has to be somewhere you can't go. For it to bug you, there has to be something else around that can."

He nodded under my hand, then straightened up. "I'm all right now. Just tired. You want to know where and what?"

Poloscki had put down the coffee now and was dangling the chain. An whirled to stare.

"Where?" he said. "Other universes."

"Galaxies further out?" asked Poloscki.

"No. Completely different matrices of time and space." Staring at the swinging ball seemed to calm him even more. "No physical or temporal connection to this one at all."

"A sort of parallel — "

"Parallel? Hell!" It was almost a drawl. "There's nothing parallel about them. Out of the billions-to-the-billionth of them, most are hundreds of times the size of ours and empty. There are a few, though, whose entire spatial extent is even smaller than this galaxy. Some of them are completely dense to us, because even though there seems to be matter in them, distributed more or less as in this universe, there's no electromagnetic activity at all. No radio waves, no heat, no light." The globe swung; the voice was a whisper.

I closed my fist around the globe and took it from Poloscki. "How do you know about them? Who brings back the information? Who is it who can get out?"

Blinking, An looked back at me.

When he told me, I began to laugh. To accommodate the shifting reality tensions, the psychotic personality that is golden is totally labile. An laughed with me, not knowing why. He explained through his torrential hysteria how with the micro-micro surgical techniques from Tyber-44 they had read much of the information from a direct examination of the creature's nervous system, which covered its surface like velvet. It could take intense cold or heat, a range of

pressure from, vacuum to hundreds of pounds per square millimeter; but a fairly small amount of ultraviolet destroyed the neural synapses, and they died. They were small and deceptively organic because in an organic environment they appeared to breathe and eat. They had four sexes, two of which carried the young. They had clusters of retractible sense organs that first appeared to be eyes, but were sensitive to twelve distinct senses, stimulation for three of which didn't even exist in our continuum. They traveled around on four suction cups when using kinetic motion for ordinary traversal of space, were small, and looked furry. The only way to make them jump universes was to scare the life out of them. At which point they just disappeared.

An kneaded his stomach under his belt to ease the pain from so much laughter. "Working with them at Tyber-44 just cracked up a whole bunch of golden." He leaned against the desk, panting and grinning. "They had to be sent home for therapy. We still can't think about them directly, but it's easier for us to control what we think about than for you; that's part of being golden. I even had one of them for a pet, up until yesterday. The damn creatures are either totally apathetic, or vicious. Mine was a baby, all white and soft." He held out his arms. "Yesterday it bit me and disappeared." On his wrist there was a bluish place centred on which was a crescent of pin-pricks. "Lucky it was a baby. The bites infect easily."

Poloscki started drinking from my cup again as An and I started laughing all over.

As I walked back that night, black coffee slopped in my belly.

There are certain directions in which you cannot go. Choose one in which you can move as far as you want. Sandy said that? He did. But there was something about Sandy, very much like someone golden. It doesn't matter how, he's going on.

Under a street lamp I stopped and lifted up the ecologarium. The reproductive function, was it primary or adjunctive? If, I thought with the whisky lucidity always suspect at dawn, you consider the whole ecological balance a single organism, it's adjunctive, a vital reparative process along with sleeping and eating, to the primary process which is living, working, growing. I put the chain around my neck.

I was still half soused, and it felt bad. But I howled. Androcles, is drunken laughter appropriate to mourn all my dead children? Perhaps not. But tell me, Ratlit; tell me Alegra: what better way to launch my live ones who are golden into night? I don't know. I know I laughed. Then I put my fists into my overall pouch and crunched homeward along the Edge while on my left the world-wind roared.

Samuel R. Delaney is where it is at: multi-mediumed, trans-cultural,

interracial, call it multiplicity

He has never really decided whether he is a mathematician, musician, or writer. On the record, writing has the edge: at twenty-six, he has published seven novels (the latest — The Einstein Intersection, *Ace, 1967) and an eighth,* Nova, *is due out shortly from Doubleday. But he has also worked as a singer, guitarist, actor, producer for a recording studio, and — most recently — organised his own group*. The Heavenly Breakfast (4 *voices,* 3 *guitars, an incredible variety of flutes). When 'The Star-Pit' was dramatised on radio station WBAI last winter, he wrote the script, read the narration, helped score the music, and played apprentice audio engineer. He also cooks, and occasionally paints.*

He has wandered through most of Europe, has a speaking acquaintance with at least five languages; he is married to his high-school girl friend, the poet and co-editor of City, *Marilyn Hacker, and they live anywhere: London, San Francisco, Greece, the East Village — well, mostly New York. He can look natural in a tux, but prefers one earring and a psychedelic red weskit.*

He is unique, of course, but not as *unique as you may think. You could pose him for a composite portrait of The Artist as a Young Folkrock Graduate, circa 1970. Of course, he had a headstart: dropped out of upper-middle-class Harlem (before teenyboppers were invented) and was given a scholarship to the Breadloaf Writers' Conference at seventeen for his first novel, written while majoring in math at the Bronx High School of Science. So actually, he's just a bit ahead of where it is otherwise at: approximately where the kids you worry about today will be tomorrow.*

Tuli Kupferberg is a Fug. If you haven't heard him, you've probably seen him, and if you haven't seen or heard him, you've read his messages on lapel buttons. He is the proprietor of Birth Press (a mimeograph), publishing Yeah!, Birth, *and anything else as the spirit moves him; author of* One Thousand and One Ways to Beat the Draft *(Grove, 1968), and other self-help books; inventor of the erectarine, a 'vertical tambourine'. He is one of the moving spirits behind the* East Village Other, *and a frequent contributor. In the Fugs, he plays rhythm instruments, writes songs, sings, and does pantomime. 'Kill, Kill, Kill for Peace' is one of his tunes; at forty-three, he claims to be 'the oldest rock 'n' roll star in America', and probably is.*

Personal
Tuli Kupferberg

There was once an atom bomb who wanted to be a bullet.

"Why," said his fellow atom bombs, "when you can be a great A-bomb, do you want to be a little *bullet*?"

"I miss," said the bomb, sighing, "the personal touch."

The first SF *Annual, in 1956, was called* The Year's Greatest Science Fiction and Fantasy; *that title stayed on the paperback (it was a Dell Original) for four years, although the simultaneous hardcover edition published by Gnome Press switched to just* SF:1957 *with the second volume. In 1960, the book became a hardcover original, published by Simon & Schuster, and the title changed to* The Fifth *(and etc.)* Annual of the Year's Best SF. *When Dell inaugurated its own hard-back line, Delacorte Press, the book went back home, so to speak: that was the* 10th Annual.

The first ten Annuals all concluded with a Summation of the year in science fiction and — increasingly — speculative writing generally, and with a listing of Honourable Mention stories. The Honourable Mentions were dropped from the 11th Annual, *for the same reasons — already extensively explained here — that the title was changed this year to read simply* SF 12. *It would be as absurd, at this point, to attempt to 'sum up' what has happened in speculative writing since the last volume as it would have been to call this collection either an 'Anthology of Science Fiction' or 'The Year's Best' of — well, what?*

It should be clearly understood, then, that what follows does not represent any comprehensive culling of work published in or out of any special category during any particular calendar period. It is simply that there were things I read or saw which I meant to mention in the course of the book, and never did.

For instance, there should have been a spot somewhere to chuckle over Giles Goat-Boy, *or to mention John Barth's thoughtful and effective article 'The Literature of Exhaustion', in* Atlantic. *And I wanted to find space to discuss at least briefly the flood of critical volumes on s-f over the past two years: H. Bruce Franklin's* Future Perfect, *I. F. Clarke's* Voices Prophesying War, *and Mark Hillegas'* The Future as Nightmare, *all from Oxford University Press; Advent's reissue of an expanded version of Damon Knight's* In Search of Wonder*; C.S. Lewis' posthumous collection of papers*. Of Other Worlds *(Harcourt); and a whole range of books of varying merit on Cabell, E. R. Burroughs, E. E. Smith, and others — right*

down to Sam Moskowitz's Six-Foot Shelf of Plodding Prose in Praise of 1950.

Somehow, I never got around to saying anything about Jean-Claude Forest's contribution to the Space Scene — Barbarella *(Grove; and — chuckles — now banned in Paris!); or Gahan Wilson's first hardcover cartoon collection,* The Man in the Cannibal Pot *(Doubleday). And then there is* Witzend, *the new Thinking Man's Comic Book, whose only real competition appears in* Grump *(items like 'Stan Mack's 5th Dimension' and 'The Urban World of Donald Silverstein').*

Possibly by the time SF 13 *comes out (on a Friday, one trusts) I will be able to do more than just mention artists like Esher, Paolozzi, and Colin Self And there's a whole stack of clippings and jottings on 'psychedelic art', posters and buttons and the 'underground press'. And I never did squeeze in any mention of* La Jetée, *or the incredible experience of Ed Emshwiller's* Relativity, *or the sad bust of* Fahrenheit 451; *but I can at least note here that Ballantine has done a fine paperback from* Juliet of the Spirits, *with the original script, a transcript of the final scenario, and a fascinating interview with Fellini.*

I wanted to make special mention of the quality — and quantity — of speculative/fabulative fiction in Transatlantic Review; *and (second place, but way up) in* Cavalier. *And I should note here, for readers really upset about the changes in this book, that there are now three field-wide science-fiction 'Bests' each year — the Carr-Wollheim* World's Best Science Fiction *(Ace), SFWA's* Nebula *(Doubleday), and a new annual coming from Putnam edited by Harry Harrison — in addition to the yearly collections published by each of the magazines.*

I am not *going to attempt to list the many outstanding short stories which were not, for all the familiar reasons, reprinted here; but let me say quickly that readers who feel strongly about some of the obvious omissions, or who know of titles I may have missed seeing entirely, are more than welcome to write in and tell me what to use* next *time. And I cannot quite stop name-dropping without a word about the delight of seeing a Nobel prize go to Asturias'* Mulata *(Delacorte).*

Less happily, it is also necessary to record here, with no space to do more than record, the deaths of two writers of major importance to speculative fiction: Paul Linebarger ('Cordwainer Smith') and Charles Beaumont.

And, finally, although it is quite impossible to thank individually each of the many people whose suggestions, criticism, advice, clerical help, or just cups-of-coffee assistance, went into the making of this book, I must express particular appreciation, for assistance entirely beyond the limits of probability, to Sharon Robinson and Bernard K.Kay.